

QUEER CHURCH: LGBTQIA+ LED AND FOCUSED FRESH
EXPRESSION AS A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE
LGBTQIA+ MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

QUEER CHURCH: LGBTQIA+ LED AND FOCUSED FRESH EXPRESSION AS A TRAUMA-SENSITIVE LGBTQIA+ MINISTRY

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This project's context was Revolution Church, an online, Open and Affirming Church. The problem addressed was that the Church often hurts and lacks the resources to minister to traumatized LGBTQIA+ Christians. The result being LGBTQIA+ Christians feel unsafe in church. Trauma sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministry creates a place of safety for those Christians. Conducted over two months, data was collected utilizing pre/post-seminar questionnaires, focused journaling, and focused group discussion. Because members of Revolution Church participated in a training about contextualized ministries due to discrimination, they viewed an LGBTQIA+ specific ministry as better trauma sensitive ministry for LGBTQIA+ Christians.

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To my family, especially my daughter Lillian, thank you for all your patience as I put entirely too many hours into the completion of this dissertation. I wouldn't be here without your love and support. To Lillian, I hope this shows you that hard work pays off and you can do anything you work towards!

To my people at Revolution Church, my advisory team for this dissertation, my friends, and everyone else I've forgotten to name, thank you! There are so many of you who helped with a word of encouragement, a listening ear, or even a drink when I'd reached my wit's end. I appreciate you all.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my grandparents. To Grandma Da who gave me the love of words on her knee when I was too small to read by myself. To Opa who always had money for books and taught me the value of the written word. To Grandpa Weidman who showed me hard work and dedication in his actions, every single day. I miss you all.

And to Grandma Weidman who still has the first book I ever wrote, a picture book from elementary school, and never lost faith in what I was capable of. I can't wait to hand you a copy of this completed document.

ABBREVIATIONS

LGBTQIA+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex,
Asexual, Aromantic, and other identities/sexualities.

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

I think it is critically important that all Christians and all people of faith show their love not by making access to God and to good exclusionary, but to seek to be inclusionary essentially to make the table of the lord as we say in the Christian church available to everyone. And when we don't know exactly what to do, let's err on the side of putting more chairs at the table and making the table larger and longer and bigger until everyone has a place.

—Bishop Dr. Yvette Flunder

INTRODUCTION

This document will be exploring the ways in which churches, particularly those who are already open and affirming, do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population. Because the Church often hurts LGBTQIA+ Christians and insufficient resources exist to help religiously traumatized LGBTQIA+ Christians, many LGBTQIA+ Christians feel unsafe in church environments. Because members of Revolution Church participated in a training about contextualized ministries due to discrimination, they viewed an LGBTQIA+ specific ministry as better trauma sensitive ministry for LGBTQIA+ Christians. These LGBTQIA+ specific ministries provide a place of safety for the religiously traumatized LGBTQIA+ Christians.

In the first chapter we will explore the ministry focus of Revolution Church, an online, open and affirming church that was created specifically to meet the diverse needs of the LGBTQIA+ community during a time when denominations are splitting and inconsistent over their treatment of the population. Included in this chapter are several facts and statistics showing the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community with religion and the church. These statistics show a disproportionate percentage of LGBTQIA+ individuals being disconnected from the Church as compared to their contemporaries who are cisgendered and heterosexual. It is upon these facts and statistics that the problem undergirding the hypothesis is founded.

In the second chapter we explore the Biblical foundation for this project, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. This scripture surrounds the “ministry of reconciliation” that has been given to all believers. As we explore this scripture in light of history and context, it becomes clear that the reconciliation is not simply vertical, between man and God, but also horizontal between people. It is this second element of the ministry of reconciliation that empowers and serves as the scriptural foundation for this project. The project itself seeks to help restore this vertical relationship by way of creating a place of safe horizontal relationships for those who have been hurt in the past by Christians and/or churches.

In the third chapter we look at the historical background of using specific, contextualized ministries as a response to discrimination. We look at the incident at St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church that resulted in the founding of the first African Methodist Episcopal Church as a direct result of the racism faced by the African American members of St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church. We see from the founding of the AME denomination that creating something specifically contextualized for a group of people, in this case Christians of African descent, can be a strong basis for a ministry that is both enduring and trauma sensitive. While we in no way seek to equalize or compare the experiences of formerly enslaved Americans with the LGBTQIA+ community, there is much richness that informs this LGBTQIA+ ministry from the experiences and tenacity of the AME founders.

In the fourth chapter we investigate theology and at the theology of eccleogenesis by Leonardo Boff. Boff studied how “base communities,” small lay led communities of faith, were formed in Brazil as a direct result of classism causing impoverished areas of

the country to have a shortage of clergy. These small communities, formed organically by marginalized people who felt a need for organized religion unmet by the Catholic Church in their region, fulfilled for themselves every aspect of Church that was allowable without ordained clergy present. It is through these experiences, and reflecting on the theological differences between Catholicism and Revolution Church's protestant roots, that we see a theological justification for a LGBTQIA+ ministry to serve as a form of church for those unserved by the existing church structure.

In the fifth chapter we explore the science of trauma. By understanding the ways in which trauma affects the human brain and nervous system, including side effects not typically associated with the brain, we can better understand the ways in which religious trauma can affect LGBTQIA+ Christians when they enter environments similar to where they were harmed. This understanding, coupled with listening to the individuals to whom we are ministering, helps to inform us how to create better trauma sensitive ministries that meet with religious needs of LGBTQIA+ Christians while avoiding the specific triggers that can prevent effective ministry.

In the final chapter we look at the project itself, a six-week workshops in which members of the Revolution Church community learned about contextualized ministry as a way to combat discrimination and provide a trauma sensitive place for marginalized people to worship. Data was obtained through pre/post surveys, focused group discussions, focused individual interviews, and focused journaling. At the end of the workshop there was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of participants who indicated that they view a specific, LGBTQIA+ led and focused ministry to be the better trauma sensitive ways to minister to the LGBTQIA+ community.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The intention of this chapter is to establish the basis for my Doctor of Ministry project. No project exists in a vacuum, with the researcher and the context of the research playing pivotal roles in the final result. This is doubly true in ministry, where the Church is typically inclusive of a building, people, traditions, and doctrine all rolled into one. This project is therefore designed to address not only an issue existent within the context of the study but also an issue of particular relevant to the researcher pastor.

The context for this project is different than your average church. Revolution Church is a made-for-online church that is designed to celebrate the diversity of the human condition, inclusive of: sexuality, gender identity, neurodiversity, disability status, age, race, ethnicity, etc. Being made-for-online means several things, firstly that every element of the church is designed for the medium of the internet rather than being an internet facsimile of an in-person church. The sermons are done via podcast audio, posted on the streaming music app Spotify as well as most podcasting apps. This allows the congregants to download the sermons directly onto their mobile device and listen whenever and wherever they please. Likewise, the worship element of Revolution Church takes place on Spotify. A playlist of music, much like a worship set that a contemporary Christian church might put together, is listed on Spotify for each sermon.

This allows the congregants to worship alongside the original recording artists at whatever point it best fits into their life.

The community elements of Revolution Church take advantage of modern software advancements allowing for both synchronous and asynchronous communication about multiple topics over the same software solution. Using a software called Discord, in which Revolution Church has a dedicated server, congregants can enter various digital rooms where they can chat over text, voice, or even video with one another. With the asynchronous nature of the church, with individuals experiencing the sermons and worship at different times and in different locations, the primary concern was in providing a method for creating and maintaining community that could be used whenever the members wished.

This element of asynchronous access is the second pillar of the made-for-online church. Millennials and younger generations have grown accustomed to the culture of streaming entertainment. Television, movies, and other forms of entertainment are available whenever the consumer wants to access them, instead of on a set schedule like the television shows of past generations. With an increasingly de-scheduled lifestyle of the younger generations, offerings that are accessible on-demand have become more popular. As such, a central element of the Revolution Church's development was the question of how church could be accomplished without a scheduled meeting.

Revolution Church is small and continuing to grow. Revolution Church has been digitally attended 67 times, with the average weekly attendance hovering around 3-4 attendees. Due to the nature of online podcast reporting, it is impossible to know how many repeat listeners there are and how many are listening for the first time. The

dominant demographic of Revolution Church attendees are either those who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ or those who are affirming of LGBTQIA+ individuals. According to Anchor.fm, the hosting site of the Revolution Church sermon podcasts, the church boasts congregants from the United States, Netherlands, and Uruguay¹. This is in keeping with Revolution Church's mission to be an open and affirming church for anybody, regardless of geographic location, who needs one.

The core ministry of Revolution Church is founded upon the understanding that LGBTQIA+ Christians often feel attacked and harmed by Christians and Christian Churches. LGBTQIA+ Christians who grew up inside of conservative and conservative-leaning churches report being told that homosexuality was unnatural and/or morally wrong². According to scholars, LGBTQIA+ individuals experience a twofold elevated lifetime chance of attempting suicide as compared to cisgendered heterosexual individuals³. In 2015, 4.5 times more LGBTQIA+ high school students surveyed reported having attempted suicide in the last 12 months, with 29.4% reporting vs 6.4% of

¹ "Revolution Church Audience," Anchor, Last modified January 25, 2023, <https://anchor.fm/dashboard/analytics/audience>.

² Joel Hollier, "‘I Will Never Be Considered Human’: The Devastating Trauma LGBTQ+ People Suffer in Religious Settings," *The Conversation*, Last modified January 11, 2023, <https://theconversation.com/i-will-never-be-considered-human-the-devastating-trauma-lgbtq-people-suffer-in-religious-settings-176360>.

³ Michael King et al., "A Systematic Review of Mental Disorder, Suicide, and Deliberate Self Harm in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People," *BMC Psychiatry* 8, no. 1 (2008), doi:10.1186/1471-244x-8-70.

cisgendered heterosexual students⁴. According to a Pew study, 29% of LGBTQIA+ adults have reported being made to feel unwelcome in a church⁵.

The defining problem of Revolution Church is that LGBTQIA+ Christians are too often hurt by churches and Christians, leaving the LGBTQIA+ Christians feeling uncomfortable in religious or ministry environments, which is reflected in church attendance statistics that show LGBTQIA+ individuals reporting significantly higher rates of being irreligious (47%) as compared to the non-LGBTQIA+ individuals (30%)⁶. Being sensitive to the hurt and trauma that has been experienced by LGBTQIA+ Christians is key to increasing the comfort of those Christians with religious and ministry experiences.

The questions regarding LGBTQIA+ inclusion have been called “the most divisive element facing the Church today” and “the fault line in American Christianity⁷” as far back as 1996, and the issue has only gotten worse. Among church communities, rarely are the ones causing division treated well. Amanda Udis-Kessler wrote about the May 2000 United Methodist General Conference, during which the session voted to uphold homophobic and transphobic stances. At these sessions LGBTQIA+ Christians

⁴ Laura Kann et al., “Sexual Identity, Sex of Sexual Contacts, and Health-Related Behaviors among Students in Grades 9–12 — United States and Selected Sites, 2015,” *MMWR, Surveillance Summaries* 65, no. 9 (December 2016): pp. 1-202, doi:10.15585/mmwr.ss6509a1.

⁵ “Chapter 6: Religion,” Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project, Last modified December 31, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/06/13/chapter-6-religion/>.

⁶ Frank Newport, “LGBT Population in U.S. Significantly Less Religious,” Gallup.com, Last modified June 4, 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/174788/lgbt-population-significantly-less-religious.aspx>.

⁷ Keith Hartman, *Congregations in Conflict: The Battle Over Homosexuality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1996), 60

and their allies protested these decisions culminating in over 200 arrests⁸. With these being the public interactions between the Church and the LGBTQIA+ community, its little surprise that the LGBTQIA+ community wants little to do with the Church.

While I grew up in a nominally-Catholic household, very little of my childhood was spent in Church. When I was in High School, I had my first real encounter with Christ, giving my life over and becoming a regular member of a local church. With my graduation from High School, however, came the end of the structured and supportive Christian community I had become a member of. When I moved to Michigan State University, having to find a new Christian community to worship with and call home, I began to struggle with an issue that would follow me until I entered vocational ministry. Despite college being a place for people to grow and expand themselves, learning new things and challenging some of the things they had been taught in their youth, I found college to be the most difficult time to be both an intellectual and a Christian.

Everywhere I went it seemed people feared the same critical thinking I was being taught in university classes being applied to the Church. The first Christian group that I became associated with was the Spartan Christian Fellowship, a group based out of the University Reformed Church. While I made some friends in the group, and even met my first wife through one of their events, I found myself consistently at odds with the leadership over theological questions.

It began simply enough with the differences between Arminianism and Calvinism. I had, and continue to have, issues with the Calvinist idea of predestination.

⁸ Amanda Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion in the United Methodist Church. New Approaches in Sociology* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor & Francis, 2008).
<http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=342960>.

This led to consistent arguments with the leadership and the insistence that there was no way I could become a leader within SCF while I publicly questioned one of the theological centers of the Church that sponsored the group. This irritated me, but I dealt with it for a season.

Eventually, I began to enter into my first season of theological deconstruction. I was still reading diversely, and began to question the ways in which this group spoke of issues like sin and hell. As I sought nuance and diversity of understanding, I found only irritation and intransigence on the part of the people who were supposed to be walking alongside me. Eventually, one of the leaders asked me to meet with him privately and told me, “With ideas like those, you can’t come back to SCF.” I had not asked anyone else to take my views, only to accept that I had questions while on this journey. That alone was a step too far.

This began a season of my life essentially defined by my seeking acceptance from Christian organizations and being rejected for nuances of difference in theological stance. I was rejected from one Church due to differences in opinion about which purity expectations from the Bible were relevant in the modern world due to cultural changes. Another Church refused to marry myself and my first wife because we had cohabitated before marriage. It seemed as though everywhere I turned, my natural curiosity and intellectualism was being met by a Church that viewed questions and differences in theology as so significant a risk that I need be ostracized rather than poison others.

Years passed with me keeping my head down, afraid to say anything to be ostracized from yet another community. In that time, I was married to my first wife and we moved down to Lexington, Kentucky where we both began our graduate studies. She

started and eventually aborted a PhD program, while I began the Masters of Fine Arts in Writing program that I would finish shortly after the birth of our daughter and our return back to Michigan. In that time, I served in ministry and worshipped within the Church, but I was afraid to question. My desire to be accepted outweighed my desire to understand.

Two years after the birth of my daughter, my life would fall apart. I learned of an affair on my wife's part, one that she was not willing to leave, and entered into a divorce. I moved back into my parents' house with my daughter and began to attend a large church in the area. It was there that I received my call to ministry but also there that I would receive my biggest lesson about who I am as a Christian and who I would be as a pastor. It was around this time that two things happened concurrently in my home life. The first was that I began dating the woman who would become my second (and current) wife. The second was that my father stumbled in his recovery from alcoholism and began drinking again. When my father would begin drinking, what would follow would often be abuse to those around him and eventually a suicide attempt. This time would be no different.

One afternoon, my two-year-old daughter was playing in the living room and beginning to have a temper tantrum. My father, who had already begun drinking for the day, told me, "Either you discipline your daughter, or I will." I knew this to be a threat of a "discipline" far in excess of what any two-year-old could possibly deserve for a temper tantrum. This was my last straw. I told my father that if he touched my daughter, he would have to deal with me, and told my mother that Lillian and I would be moving out that day.

My girlfriend (now second ex-wife) offered to have Lillian and myself move in with her, knowing that we could not afford a place of our own and it would not be safe for us to remain with my father. I took her up on the offer, an arrangement that ended up beneficial to both of us when she was laid off a few weeks later, with my income able to cover the cost of rent. When the Church I was interning at found out we were living together, even knowing about the situation with my daughter, my internship was terminated and I was told that I could no longer serve in the youth department. Once again, I had been rejected and ostracized by a faith community.

It was this rejection, however, that God used to bring me to God's place for me in ministry. Eliza and I knew that we needed to find a new faith community, but we also knew that we could not worship in a place where LGBTQIA individuals like ourselves and our loved-ones would not feel safe and accepted. We tried a few different Churches, but found our home at Asbury United Methodist Church in Flint. There we found a grace and love that Church had been missing. There, the pastor and his wife were aghast when they heard about the previous Church's treatment of us because of our situation. There, I was hired first as a sound guy and eventually as the youth pastor.

It was within the United Methodist Church, and specifically the LGBTQ-affirming arm of the Church, that I found everything I had been lacking in the Church experiences I had had thus-far. It was within that Church that both myself and Eliza had been first able to admit to Christians that we were bisexual. It was there that I could ask questions, learning divergent theologies, and discuss them with a pastor who did not view the conversation as a danger. I was free to be an intellectual, a writer, and a Christian all at the same time. A year into my time at Flint Asbury UMC, my pastor helped me to

realize that my call to ministry was not exclusively to youth. I began seminary at United Theological Seminary and began my formal licensure process within the United Methodist Church.

In seminary, those freedoms I found when I first entered the United Methodist Church were expanded. Here, I found a place where not only was I free to intellectually address the Bible and learn about different theological frameworks, but it was part of the process. Many of the questions I found myself asking, and being kicked out of Christian fellowships for, were part of the course materials. I had found a home where faith and reason could co-exist, not be forever positioned as enemies to one another. A place where questions were expected, not frowned upon. I knew I was meant to be a pastor, but I was meant to be the kind of pastor I had needed all those years. Someone who greeted intellectualism, doubts, and questions as friends. Someone who addressed the Bible as both the Holy Scriptures and an antique manuscript requiring nuanced reading.

I learned about myself that I am the kind of Christian and the kind of pastor who believes that the Church cannot be in the business of trying to ‘fix’ people. That it is solely the purview of God. I believe that the nuances of the human condition are too complex for us to presume to know the mind of God about any decision well enough to make someone feel as though they must change or be unwanted. I have come to believe that the job of the pastor and of the Church is to bring the person into a relationship with Jesus Christ and, through the sacrament of Baptism, with the Holy Spirit. It is through those persons that conviction of sin will happen, and then through the community of the Church that discipleship will happen in light of that conviction.

As I traversed through my process, moving from youth pastor at Flint Asbury to assistant pastor at Lansing Asbury—before finally being appointed to my first Church in Oak Grove, Michigan—I learned something else about myself as a pastor. In a denomination tearing itself apart at the seams over what we do about the “LGBTQIA problem,” I am not content sitting in the center—safe in my privilege of being in a heterosexual relationship—and allow my LGBTQIA brethren to be harmed by the inaction of those who prize a false unity over helping the marginalized in our midst. I had found my home. I had found my voice. I had found my cause.

But this cause was not an easy road. The United Methodist Book of Discipline read as follows regarding human sexuality:

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church⁹.

So not only did my own identity walk a fine line within the denomination, not technically a violation but certainly against the spirit of the paragraph, but my ministry was directed entirely at people living in violation of that stance.

During my time at Lansing Asbury, I found myself drawn into those ministries that helped the marginalized and embraced those feeling estranged from the institutional Church. I created a Pub Theology that met monthly, ultimately featuring a mixture of Christians, atheists, Muslims, Pagans, and Jewish people as regular attendees. We would discuss issues like systemic oppression, poverty, and the nature of Hell in an atmosphere

⁹ United Methodist Church (U.S.), *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶304.3

of complete equality. This allowed for the building of great relationships between different religious communities in Lansing and showed Lansing Asbury UMC was the kind of faith community that would love and accept others.

Near the end of my time at Lansing Asbury I began the work to form a Tiny Home Homelessness Ministry. This ministry would have focused on providing Tiny Homes for use as temporary dwellings for homeless individuals, perhaps including the possibility to then rent-to-own the Tiny Homes. These Tiny Homes would be a superior homelessness solution for families, transgendered individuals, and those with disabilities that prevent them from full access to traditional homeless shelters. This ministry began to gain popular support as well as partnership with other local organizations like the Metro Lansing Poor People's Campaign but was eventually dropped as a Church priority during a discussion of budget. The project remains a local priority for the other groups who partnered with Lansing Asbury.

In the years that followed, I have been appointed to three centrist Churches in primarily conservative areas. This has taught me the skill of "moving the needle." Creating an atmosphere that is accepting and affirming, but knowing that formally it is going to be a process before the Church becomes formally affirming. Having the tough conversations, introducing questions of identity to those who have never considered the experiences of someone with a gender or sexual identity different than their own. This is the hard work of creating inclusivity.

In the middle of my appointment in Nashville, it came out that my then-wife had been having a string of affairs. She was soon diagnosed as a sex addict and went into treatment, but the damage to our relationship was done. We attempted counseling, but

ultimately, she decided that the work to repair what she had broken was not worth it. The divorce, combined with the fact that she spread biased information to some of the congregants, led to a culture where there was no choice but to move me at the end of the appointment year. In the process of discussing that appointment with the District Superintendent, I made it clear that I did not want to hide my identity with my new churches. I was given a two-point charge in Ionia, Michigan, where one of the two was considered to be a temporary appointment until a new arrangement could be found. The larger church, the one that was not considered temporary, was billed as an Open and Affirming church where LGBTQIA+ Christians would be welcomed.

In my first weeks at the Open and Affirming church, I revealed myself as bisexual during one of the Sunday sermons. The reaction was immediate and surprising. One of the lay leaders immediately stepped down from leadership and several other members of the congregation stopped coming to the church. The response was clear. They were okay with having LGBTQIA+ Christians worshipping with them, but not having a pastor who is part of that community. They welcomed, but they did not affirm the LGBTQIA+ community. Over the following three months, the issues continued to mount, until I went out of town for a week. Returning, I found that both of my churches had requested that the District Superintendent remove me as their pastor for reasons that boiled down to my sexuality.

I was hurt and confused, but the situation was not over yet. The official letter that I got pertaining to the end of my appointment listed the reason as “pastoral failure” and therefore demanded that I intend a disciplinary meeting before being eligible to receive any further appointments. It was at this point that I took some time to seek God in the

situation. Where before God's leading had always been back to the UMC, to make a difference in the denomination, the message this time was different. It was time to leave. I could no longer follow my call to serve the LGBTQIA+ community and be faithfully myself within the United Methodist Church. Within a year's time I would be undergoing a second painful separation.

Following my exit from the UMC, I sought my direction, and was led to the United Church of Christ. Initially I was uncertain, given the fact that churches within the denomination are not required to be Open and Affirming, but I was soon introduced to a denomination that partners with the UCC closely. TFAM, The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, works so closely with the UCC that they can serve a UCC church as pastor without any additional credentialing. There was just one major difference. TFAM has it as a core doctrinal statement that members must be "radically inclusive," a term that covers race, ethnicity, disability, gender identity, and sexuality, among others. I began working on my ordination through them.

Acceptance and inclusivity are a problem that goes beyond the current and obvious situation of same-sex marriage and LGBTQIA+ ordination. We in the business of church often make the mistake of putting out focus on the fact that denominations are dividing over these two core issues. We think that if our church is staying on the side that will affirm LGBTQIA+ individuals, we have done all the work we need to do. This is an incorrect assumption. Often LGBTQIA+ individuals come to us with unhealed wounds from family, other Christians, and even other churches. While we are not the cause of these wounds, if we wish for the LGBTQIA+ individual to once again trust the church and adherents to our faith, it is our job to assist in the healing process.

It was this mistake, mixed with a centrism that feared making any move that could upset the traditionalists in our midst, that both permeated all of my previous churches and prompted the creation of Revolution Church. Those harmed by the church or individuals they view as representing the church are not healed by simply hearing that a congregation is welcoming them. They must see the kinds of specific and affirming love that only comes from those who truly believe that there is no difference between heterosexual and homosexual love and believe that gender is inbuilt by God but not necessarily as defined by the individual's primary sexual characteristics. Middling love, love that is couched in "I don't know if I agree, but they should feel welcome," is not the kind of love that heals wounds.

Acceptance, inclusion, and diversity are core values of Generations Y and Z¹⁰. According to a recent Pew Research survey, Millennials and Generation Z are almost 50% more likely to view same-sex marriage as a positive thing than Generation X and almost twice as likely as Baby Boomers¹¹. The same study showed that Millennials who self-identified as "Republican" or "Leaning Republican" are approximately 50% more likely than Baby Boomers and Generation X to say that African Americans are treated less fairly in America¹². Generation Z who self-identify the same way are approximately twice as likely to say that African Americans are treated unfairly¹³. A Tallo survey of

¹⁰ Kim Parker and Ruth Igielnik, "On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far," *Pew Research Center*, May 14, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/>.

¹¹ Parker and Igielnik, "Gen Z."

¹² Parker and Igielnik, "Gen Z."

¹³ Parker and Igielnik, "Gen Z."

Generation Z showed that 44% had experienced discrimination based on their race, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation at work and 51% have experienced discrimination at school¹⁴. The same survey went on to show that 88% of Generation Z surveyed said that they believed that potential employers should ask an individual's preferred pronouns, with 25% stating that they would decline a job offer if their preferred pronouns were not used¹⁵.

One analysis of twenty-five studies including 214,344 heterosexual people and 11,971 LGBTQIA+ people revealed a massive disparity in suicide attempts between heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ persons. The analysis showed that LGBTQIA+ individuals have a 200% higher chance of having attempted suicide as compared to cisgendered and heterosexual counterparts¹⁶. A 2012 Surgeon General's report showed that 12-19% of LGBTQIA+ adults reported having made a suicide attempt as compared to less than 5% of their heterosexual and cisgendered peers. Among adolescents the numbers are even larger with 30% of LGBTQIA+ adolescents having reported suicide attempts as opposed to 8-10% of all adolescents, a number that includes the aforementioned 30%¹⁷. Fewer

¹⁴ Joanne Johnson, "Diversity and Inclusion? Gen Z's About That," *Businesswire*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20201021005098/en/Diversity-and-Inclusion-Gen-Z%E2%80%99s-About-That>

¹⁵ Johnson, "Diversity and Inclusion"

¹⁶ M King, J Semlyen, S.S. Tai, *et al.* "A systematic review of mental disorder, suicide, and deliberate self harm in lesbian, gay and bisexual people." *BMC Psychiatry* **8**, 70 (2008): <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-8-70>

¹⁷ Office of the Surgeon General (US); National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (US). 2012 National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action: A Report of the U.S. Surgeon General and of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. Washington (DC): US Department of Health & Human Services (US); 2012 Sep. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK109917/>

datasets currently exist specifically for the transgender community, but one 2011 study shows that 41% of the transgendered respondents had attempted suicide¹⁸.

When we consider what makes life seem unlivable for LGBTQ people who attempt or complete suicide, our metaphors matter. When we speak only in psychological metaphors of psyche or self, we tend toward a psychologization or medicalization of LGBTQ suicide. We make these experiences into indicators of “depression” or other psychopathologies, easily dismissing the complexities of the experience for LGBTQ people. While psychology and psychiatry hold valuable insight for helping us think about suicide among LGBTQ people, these literatures tend to overlook the nuance and critical significance of how religious beliefs, theological narratives, and spiritual practices affect the lives of LGBTQ people leading up to suicide attempt¹⁹.

Given the fact that these generations are the future of the church, these statistics should be printed and taped to the walls of every pastor’s office. If a church’s stances and practices drive away the majority of the next three generations, that church is at a serious risk of dying due to attrition. If a church wants to attract the upcoming generations, it needs to be serious about the social and justice concerns that those generations are serious about. These generations value diversity, including sexuality and gender identity, and have reason to view the church as an enemy to diversity.

For Revolution Church this all comes together in a clear but geographically disparate need. Revolution Church does not claim to be the only open and affirming church, but is certainly in the minority of American churches. This means that LGBTQIA+ individuals in larger and more liberal cities and suburban areas might be able to find a church that accepts them, many living in conservative communities might

¹⁸ Jaime M Grant, Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman, and Mara Keisling. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey* (Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011), 1.

¹⁹ Cody J Sanders, *Christianity, Lgbtq Suicide, and the Souls of Queer Folk. Emerging Perspectives in Pastoral Theology and Care* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020).

not have a local faith community that would accept and love them for who they are.

Therefore, the problem is one of reach. Revolution Church seeks to resolve this problem both through its made-for-online design, allowing it to be the home church for anyone who cannot find an affirming space in their local community, but also through being transparent that it is a queer-led and queer-focused ministry. Pastored by a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and speaking specifically to the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

As a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, I recognize that the only place I feel immediately safe and accepted is among other queer people. That is not to say that I do not have heterosexual and cisgendered friends and loved ones with whom I feel safe, but when I encounter a new face or a new situation, there is always the question of whether my sexuality or gender identity will be a problem. Around other queer people, I know I will find acceptance. We speak a similar language, being a marginalized group that is both blessed by our ability to hide that which makes us marginalized, but also cursed by the expectation that we will do so whenever it is more convenient for the cisgendered and heterosexual people around us. Because we can pretend to be straight, refer to our partners as “roommates” or “friends” and abstain from public displays of affection, our marginalization is minimized by the same people who seek to limit how often we express our true selves.

If we are to come before God as our true selves, queer people need a place where we can worship as our whole selves. Where we can come forward with our partners for prayers and support, where we can express the difficulties of being visibly queer in a straight world, and where we can come before God without having to keep vigilant not to

let the mask slip. This is possible in a church run by cisgendered heterosexual people, but it is easier among those who understand.

Through my own experiences of acceptance and rejection in ministry, the theme of affirmation is clear. With my first appointments to churches within the United Methodist Church, before any but a selected few within my congregations knew I was queer, the question became one of degrees of acceptance. For the aging congregations I served, populated almost exclusively by cisgendered and heterosexual individuals, the question became one of how much they were required to change. The question commonly took the form of wondering why members of the LGBTQIA+ community cannot be content with a particular subset of affirmation. Whether it is being welcome in the service, being allowed to serve within the church, or not facing any overt pushback for bringing their partner with, the question always seemed to be why the LGBTQIA+ community could not simply be happy with what they had already been given.

This extended to the denominational politics. When appointed to the final two churches I served within the United Methodist Church, I was told that the larger of the two was open and affirming. What I came to find from experience was that this identity was rooted in the same kind of question I faced at my previous churches. While they were fully accepting of the LGBTQIA+ community, they were not willing to advertise that fact for fear of backlash from their conservative community.

Their question was “why can’t the LGBTQIA+ community be happy that they are accepted here, without us being public about it?” When I pressed them to make good on the part of their agreement to be open and affirming that stipulated that they had marketed themselves as such, the leadership team asked for me to be removed from the church.

Committed more to maintaining the denomination's financial status quo than reaching out to the LGBTQIA+ community, that request was granted.

What I have found since leaving the United Methodist Church is that, in affirming denominations, the struggle of the church is different but related to that the UMC faced. While those members of the LGBTQIA+ community who attend fully affirming churches would find themselves loved for who they are, many of those churches have relatively-few LGBTQIA+ individuals in attendance. The issue is one of trust. Walking into a church led and populated by primarily cisgendered and heterosexual individuals requires trusting that group's definition of what it means to be affirming of LGBTQIA+ individuals. If this group's definition is couched in the concept that "all sinners are welcome" instead of a steadfast belief that LGBTQIA+ individuals are exactly as God created them to be, attending that risk requires opening oneself up to the risk of being hurt.

The core problem as I see it is that many LGBTQIA+ individuals have been hurt by churches and Christians and therefore feel uncomfortable in churches and Christian ministries. I hypothesize that if LGBTQIA+ Christians were to experience a ministry that was both led by a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and focused on the experience of LGBTQIA+ individuals, they would begin to feel more comfortable in some churches and Christian ministries.

The general nature of this research took the form of a workshop teaching participants who are part of the extended community of Revolution Church which includes attendees, partnering clergy, and other advisors. This workshop taught these participants the content of the foundation chapters of this document, speaking to the ways

in which LGBTQIA+ led and focused ministries can act as a more trauma-sensitive way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community. This workshop took place over six weeks paired with a six-week sermon series posted on the Revolution Church podcast feed.

What was being evaluated during this workshop was the participant's view of what kind of ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population is better in terms of trauma-sensitivity. This data was obtained through a question, given before and after the six-week ministry, of which option they would consider to be the better way to minister with the LGBTQIA+ community among two provided options. One option reflected the traditional method of ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community involving an attempt to integrate the LGBTQIA+ individuals into an existing church body. The second provided option reflects the LGBTQIA+ led and focused ministry that this document presents as a better trauma-sensitive way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community.

Additionally, specific information regarding thought processes and more nuanced feelings about trauma-sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministry will be obtained through journal prompts and the content of the group discussions.

It was hoped that experiencing this workshop will change the participants' views of LGBTQIA+ ministry to view LGBTQIA+ led and focused ministry as a better and more trauma-sensitive way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population. Since the participants' views of ministry among the LGBTQIA+ community could be changed in just six weeks, further workshops or trainings in the same vein could be utilized to train individuals to start and run these trauma-sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministries in their own contexts.

Since my study of this subject will not terminate with the completion of this research and fulfillment of my degree requirements, of particular importance are the learnings found regarding the participants' feelings of being equipped or unequipped to start or run such a ministry themselves. While that metric is not of paramount importance for the hypothesis of this document, that information is vital to understanding how to move future participants from the point of perspective change to being comfortable starting or running such a ministry. Such data has ramifications beyond the research itself, giving a greater foundational understanding to future attempts to expand upon this workshop and turn it into a training.

While beyond the scope of this project, my ultimate hope is that this research can make a significant difference in the number of LGBTQIA+ Christians represented in ministry and within the body of the church. I hope for a future in which an individual's sexuality and gender identity is as unimportant to the Church as eye color. While far beyond the scope of what can be accomplished with a six-week study, these hopes of far-reaching results of ministry that affirms LGBTQIA+ individuals is what drives this research.

In order for this hope to happen, for many LGBTQIA+ individuals who have experienced some form of religious trauma will need to take part in ministries that help them to regain a relationship to their faith in a way that is safe and reflective of their trauma experiences. The hope is that, after taking part in such an experience, some members of the LGBTQIA+ will find themselves sufficiently comfortable in church environments that they would be able to integrate into existing open and affirming congregation. For others, this goal may not be attainable. For those individuals this

manner of LGBTQIA+ led and focused ministry would be the only church safe for them to attend.

The format of this workshop will be a six-week educational workshop partnered with a sermon series through Revolution Church. As such, this workshop will be entirely online and made up of members of the extended Revolution Church community from all over the globe. This workshop will take the form of weekly 1-2 hour sessions, held over Zoom or a similar video streaming platform. During the sessions there will be an educational element where the information from the sermon is expanded upon and connected to ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community.

The sessions will then continue into a discussion time, where the participants reflect on the topic of the week. The participants will be asked a question to spawn discussion about their own lives and experiences in relation to the topic of the day's educational element. This will facilitate both the creation of community among the participants as well as a chance for participants to consider the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community and how to minister to them effectively in light of their own experiences.

The project will be implemented over a span of six weeks, with data collection taking the form of pre/post tests to show the participants' initial views of the effective ways to do ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community as compared to their views after the workshop. Additionally, focused group discussions, focused individual discussions, and focused journaling assignment will be used to obtain greater detail.

The culmination of this project will hopefully serve as evidence that a workshop can change participants' views about effective LGBTQIA+ ministry and begin the

process of equipping participants to lead such a ministry. The ultimate goal of this project is to create a resource that could be utilized both as the seed for a new church start, as it has for Revolution Church, and as a Fresh Expression for existing, affirming churches. Creating the kind of ministry of reconciliation for the LGBTQIA+ community that will be explored in the next chapter as we reflect on 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In exploring LGBTQIA+ ministry within the context of Fresh Expressions, the scripture that best elucidates the concepts is 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, in which the Apostle Paul introduces the concept of the “ministry of reconciliation” to which all believers are party. This ministry informs how we view and interact with the people to whom we minister, giving us valuable insight into ministry priorities, and therefore informing the ways in which we can provide effective and Biblical ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community while being sensitive to the real anxieties and traumas associated with the inherited church. Sensitive to these anxieties and traumas, and in light of the “ministry of reconciliation” introduced by Paul, Fresh Expressions presents itself as the ethical and compassionate way to be in ministry with a population so historically harmed by the inherited church.

In the pages that follow I will be exploring what is meant by “reconciliation” in the scripture passage, how the Apostle Paul intended for the phrase to be taken by the people of Corinth, and how it applies to our own ministries and in particular with marginalized populations. This will include a deep dive into the context of the passage, including both historical and cultural elements that lend a deeper understanding to the text. A look at the text of the passage, and in particular scholarship that sheds more light

on elements of the passage that might be obfuscated by the translation process. I will then look at how the passage functions within the second letter to the Corinthians, the larger conversation with the Corinthians, and then within the whole of Pauline writings to ascertain how our “ministry of reconciliation” works with the mission of the Church.

Furthermore, I will return to the larger topic of Fresh Expressions in ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community, to address the ways in which the “ministry of reconciliation” informs our practices with this marginalized community. I will look at how the definition of reconciliation addresses our methods for approaching ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population. How a “ministry of reconciliation” differs from the dominant ways in which the United Methodist Church has approached ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population. And finally, how our universal call to a “ministry of reconciliation” means that these ministries to marginalized populations are not a specialized ministry, but something that all churches should be undertaking as part of our commitment to fulfill the Great Commission.

Exegesis of Passage

The letters between the Apostle Paul and the churches in Corinth represent some of the most sustained correspondence we have in the canon of the New Testament. It is debated among scholars whether the letter we have entitled 2 Corinthians is made up of several fragments from separate letters.¹ These letter fragments form part of a

¹ Leander E Keck, and Members of Editorial Board, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol 11, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 5.

relationship that began around 50CE with the founding of the congregation by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. There was an initial letter, referenced in what we know as 1 Corinthians,² that has been lost. This would have happened between 50 and 54 CE. The letter we know of as 1 Corinthians was sent likely sometime in late 54 CE before both Timothy and Paul both make what we refer to as the “sorrowful visit.” There is another lost letter, known as the “tearful letter,” sent in late 55 CE before the letter in fall of 55 CE that accounts for chapters 1-9 of what we now know as 2 Corinthians.³

The area in which this congregation existed is one with a significant past. At the southwest end of an isthmus connecting mainland Greece and the Peloponnesus, there was formerly a larger city called Corinth in the location. This “wealthy” Corinth, because of being a hub of commerce for the region, began to come under threat by the Roman Empire and in 146 BCE was destroyed by the Romans.⁴ Despite its destruction, there is evidence that much of the old city of Corinth remained standing and continued to be populated to some degree. In the year 44 BCE a directive was issued by Julius Caesar for a new colony to be created in the location of the former Greek city. This was done for a purely commercial reason, as the site of the old city of Corinth was strategically important for trade coming from the nearby sea.

² 1 Cor 5:9-11, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

³ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2005), 145.

⁴ Raymond F. Collins, *Second Corinthians* (Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament) (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 3.

This colony differed from many Roman colonies because, instead of being settled by veterans, the population was drawn primarily from the poor.⁵ “This means, in turn, that the first settlers were not in fact “Romans” but persons from the eastern Mediterranean, probably for the most part Syrians, Egyptians, and Jews, men and women “of no nationality and of a civilization not their own.”⁶ As we come to discuss the concept of the “ministry of reconciliation” contained within these verses, this diverse makeup of the colony will be important to remember. Unlike most Roman population centers, where most of the population was relatively uniform, the population of Corinth was always incredibly diverse and made up of marginalized people groups⁷.

It mattered little who the gods were or what the cults taught. What was important was whether one's needs were being met - whether everyday desires for health, wealth and safety and, more importantly, power and esteem, were being fulfilled. In Corinth, perhaps more than elsewhere, people looked to the cults for satisfaction, and satisfaction as they defined it, as personal exaltation and glory. They wanted religion to confirm and satisfy their yearnings, not challenge to and transform them⁸.

⁵ Victor Paul Furnish, *The Anchor Bible, vol 32A, 2nd Corinthians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1984), 6-7.

⁶ Furnish, *2nd Corinthians*, 7.

⁷ Charles R Swindoll, *Insights on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 2017), 8.

⁸ Timothy B Savage, “Power through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians,” *Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, No. 86*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The section of scripture directly before the passages I focus on are the often-quoted section reading:

For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore, all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!⁹

While this section is often handled separately from the section that follows on the “ministry of reconciliation,” there is a clear connection between the two. “Paul has been speaking in vv. 14–17 of the Christ-event and its consequences. Now he makes it clear that all this derives from God, for reconciliation to God was the ultimate purpose.¹⁰” Far from these segments being separate, the section regarding the “ministry of reconciliation” is intended to be explanatory of the ultimate purpose behind our existence as a new creation. That is, we are made new so that we might be the vessels through which others are reconciled to God. In order to truly understand what that means, however, we must look more deeply into what the verses that make up this passage are saying.

This first verse of the passage, verse 18, reads: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;”.¹¹ Central to our understanding of this verse, as well as the larger passage, is our understanding of what specifically is meant by the word translated into

⁹ 2 Cor. 5:14-17 (NRSV).

¹⁰ Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Second Epistle of the Corinthians: Vol 1: Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I-VII* (London, UK: T&T Clark International, 2004), 2 Cor. 5:18.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 5:18 (NRSV).

“reconciliation” which we have both received from Christ and been charged to extend as our ministry.

This is the usual language of N.T., in which the change which brings about the reconciliation between God and men is regarded as taking place in them rather than in Him. Greeks thought of God as estranged from men, and it was He who needed to be won over. Jews thought rather that it was men who by their sins were estranged from God, and the sins had to be ‘cleansed,’ or ‘purged,’ or ‘covered,’ in order to bring about reconciliation (see on 1 Jn. 2:2). St Paul follows Jewish rather than Hellenic thought. It is man who is reconciled to God, rather than God to man.¹²

This difference in how reconciliation is viewed between the Hellenistic culture, which Corinth would have been steeped in, and the Jewish culture is important beyond the historical context. Firstly, it is important to note that God does not do the changing. When Paul speaks of Christ reconciling us to God, it is either our hearts or the circumstances that change, not God (or by extension, Christ). Often the focus is on it being our hearts that change, but before Christ, salvation would have been functionally impossible regardless of our hearts. It was not until the circumstances changed, when Jesus made a way for us, that salvation could be possible. In that moment it did not matter if we changed. Instead, the penalty for our sins was taken off of us and placed upon Christ, allowing us to be reconciled with the unchanging God.

¹² Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 2 Cor. 5:18.

That is the legalistic view of salvation, the one that weighs sins against punishment. But there is a relational aspect as well, one that Paul addresses in this letter to the Church in Corinth:

The basic idea of reconciliation is the restoration of friendly relationships after a period of enmity or estrangement. In the NT it appears to be an essentially Pauline concept, since the verb καταλλάσσω and its cognates appear only in the Pauline literature. The language is found in secular Greek,¹⁶⁶² but plays no significant part in religious vocabulary. As a religious term, it is infrequent in Greek-speaking Judaism also.¹³

This Greek term, common among secular language and infrequent among the religious, was the term commonly used in the restoration of personal relationships between friends or family members, rather than terms more commonly used for legal status of guilt or innocence.¹⁴ This is striking because of the term's implication of mutuality. Unlike the legal language, wherein the guilty party is responsible for resolving the problem and thereby reconciling themselves with the law, this use of language implies a mutual drawing-near with the intention of resolving what divides the relationship. This concept of reconciliation is reflective of not only what Christ has offered to us, but also is what we have been instructed to extend to others in our own "ministry of reconciliation."

The phrase [ministry of reconciliation] parallels earlier references to "the ministry of the Spirit" (3:8) and "the ministry of righteousness" (3:9), which he had contrasted with "the ministry of death" (3:7) and "the ministry of condemnation" (3:9) respectively.

¹³ Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 2 Cor. 5:18.

¹⁴ Mitzi L Minor, *2 Corinthians* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2009), 115.

The genitive *of reconciliation* is qualitative, as in the other instances: Paul refers to a ministry that deals with reconciliation.¹⁵

This not only highlights a connective tissue between this passage and earlier chapters in this letter to the church in Corinth but gives us information on what this particular piece of phrasing by Paul likely means. In chapter 3, Paul posits that “if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?”¹⁶ Here Paul is clearly contrasting the Mosaic covenant with Jesus’s new covenant. He refers to the Mosaic covenant as the “ministry of death” and the “ministry of condemnation” because of the inability of mankind to hold to the covenant, resulting in all humanity living in a state of sinfulness. By comparison Paul refers to Jesus’s covenant as the “ministry of the Spirit,” the “ministry of righteousness,” and then finally the “ministry of reconciliation.” Instead of death, we have the promise of eternal life and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Instead of condemnation, we live in a state of inherited righteousness with God. Both of these, ultimately, are through and because of the reconciliation offered to us through Christ.

Further, both this offer of reconciliation as well as the charge of a “ministry of reconciliation” is not extended only to the apostles or the Corinthians themselves. While some have argued that the phrasing in the second half of verse 18 is intended only for Paul and his co-workers, Thrall argues “But it is more likely that the reference is to all

¹⁵ Furnish, *2nd Corinthians*, 317.

¹⁶ 2 Cor. 3:7-8 (NRSV).

believers, in view of the universal scope attributed to God's reconciling activity in v. 19."¹⁷ It is not just about the people who are currently chosen to be ministers, like the apostles and the early Church leaders, but everybody. It is this universalism of the statement that is important. Just as all people are offered the gift of reconciliation through Christ, all who accept this gift of reconciliation are expected themselves to be part of the "ministry of reconciliation." Extending that gift to others.

Continuing to parse the meanings of reconciliation, Georgia Harkness describes it in the following way:

Reconciliation is *agape* in action, but *agape* felt and expressed in the face of all that stands in the way of its fulfillment... We noted a moment ago that *shalom*, or "peace" in the biblical sense, is also a very close synonym of reconciliation. This is true as an ingredient of the spirit that prompts one to act in reconciling love. Yet it is also the fruit of reconciling love. It is the high reward of one who does not seek the peace of passivity through avoidance of struggle, but who sees his duty and does it in trust of God and the power of love.¹⁸

In these three scholars, I believe we see distinct elements of reconciliation, all of which are necessary for a complete understanding. Reconciliation involves, but is not exclusively, the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of ourselves to right relationship with God. It is also a restoration of relationship, bringing us back into a loving relationship with God. While the catalyst for the breaking of the relationship was our sinfulness, we know from our own lives that relationships are not immediately mended by the redress of issues. It is important to note the restoration of relationship as a separate

¹⁷ Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 2 Cor. 5:18.

¹⁸ Harkness, Georgia Elma, *The Ministry of Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1971), 12-13.

and equal element of reconciliation. Finally, that reconciliation is an action borne of peace and love. This stands in stark contrast to the high-pressure tactics of much modern evangelism. This distinction will be more important later.

Verse 19 continues: “that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”¹⁹ The verse begins with the clarification that God was reconciling the world—once again pointing to the inherent universalism of the verse—to himself in Christ. But here it adds the detail that this reconciliation involved specifically not counting people’s sins against them. This is important as we remember that reconciliation is more than just the legal redress of wrongs but has a profound relational element as well.

Perhaps the most important part of this verse for understanding our ministry of reconciliation is “not counting people’s sins against them.” We know this is an integral element of God’s work of reconciliation with us through Christ, but the phrasing of these verses implies that this importance extends into our own ministries of reconciliation. Particularly considering that the sentence “not counting people’s sins against them” is directly followed by “and he has committed us to the message of reconciliation.” This shows us that the not counting of sins is inseparable from the ministry of reconciliation we have been given. That “it is an act of God accomplished whilst humanity was still hostile towards him.”²⁰

¹⁹ 2 Cor. 5:19 (NRSV).

²⁰ Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 2 Cor 5:18.

Thrall goes on to say, “In v. 19b this process is further explained: God does not hold their sins against them. It is through sinfulness that they have become estranged and hostile (Rom 5:8, 10), and reconciliation must entail the removal of this barrier to friendly relations.”²¹ While the legal remission of sins and the reconciliation of relationship are two different things, this process of not counting sins against the individual is a necessary component. When the enmity in the relationship has its genesis in the sins, the reconciliation cannot be total without the remission of those sins. This is not only a fact regarding Christ’s remission of sins, but for our own ministry of reconciliation. We cannot communicate Christ’s message of reconciliation without ourselves accepting the remittance of the sins of those we are ministering to.

Plummer expands upon this point when he says, “Although the *μὴ λογιζόμενος*²² is free and universal, yet it has to be made known to individuals, in order that they may appropriate it.”²³ This clarifies two distinct points about this element of reconciliation. First is its universality. Lambrecht writes “world” here means (sinful) humankind. “World,” however, is undoubtedly broader, more objective and universal than “us” in v. 18b.”²⁴ pointing clearly to the fact that this reconciliation is universal. It is not meant for a specific group of people or laden with preconditions. There is no amount of faithfulness or zeal necessary to obtained this remission of sins, no specific people group that one

²¹ Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 2 Cor 5:19.

²² Not counting of sins, cf Rom. 4:7, 8; Col. 1:14.

²³ Plummer, *Second Epistle*, 2 Cor 5:19.

²⁴ Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 8 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 107.

must belong to. One must only accept that their sins have been forgiven through the person of Jesus Christ.

“Reconciliation is both an accomplished fact (v. 18) and a continuing process (v. 19). Although it is a done deed as a result of Christ’s work on the cross, it nonetheless must be personally appropriated. This is where Paul and the gospel ministry fit into the picture. He, and those like him, function as God’s agents in proclaiming what has been accomplished.”²⁵ While it is universal and free, without preconditions of purity of faithfulness that must be adhered to, it is not the natural state of humanity to assume forgiveness and reconciliation. We must make not only the reality of reconciliation, but also its character of being free and universal, clear to individuals. This is a gift that must be appropriated, and one cannot appropriate that which they do not understand. This is done both through our words and our own actions, treating individuals as sinless in keeping with this remission they have been granted.

Therefore, the purpose of the “message of reconciliation,” to which we have been committed in 2 Corinthians 5:19, is to help the individual appropriate the remission of sins and reconciliation of relationship that is freely offered to them. This is something that must be communicated through both gospel and actions, which leads us to verse 20. Paul culminates this passage by saying “So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”²⁶ This nature of being an ambassador, combined with the message of reconciliation

²⁵ Linda L. Belleville, *Second Corinthians* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 157.

²⁶ 2 Cor. 5:20 (NRSV).

that has been commissioned to us as ambassadors, is key to our understanding of how we are intended to live out this passage.

Raining explains that there is significant nuance to this role of the ambassador based upon the term Paul chose to use:

However, this word may have a double meaning. When the Roman government of the time decided that a country should become a province, it would send *presbutai* to officially set up a local system of government, which then fulfilled duties such as establishing boundaries, instituting a legal system, and drawing up a new constitution for that area. Paul describes the work of an Ambassador of Christ as having the same responsibilities as the *presbutai*. He sees himself as bringing “the offer and the conditions of God, whereby men can become citizens of the empire of God and members of his family.”^{27,28}

By Raining’s reading, this term of ambassadorship holds more than simply being the messenger of the sovereign, but also helping to induct others into the family or country of the sovereign. This means that the ambassador brings not only the message of Christ’s gospel, but also meets the locals on their own terms. The ambassador does not come with a drawn-up Roman constitution, ready for the new location to sign. Instead, the ambassador works with the locals to create something that reflects who they are and the laws and expectations of the Roman government. This is a process where the ambassador meets the locals where they are at, trying to work out a mutually beneficial situation, not dictating terms to the country. This is an important element as we consider application to our own ministries.

²⁷ William Barclay, *Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1956), 234.

²⁸ Raining, Hillary Dowling. "Revisiting the Rite of Reconciliation: All May, Some Should, None Must." (DMin diss., Drew University, 2014), 12, <http://walter.drew.edu/ETD/DMin/2014/Raining/HDRaining.pdf>.

While some commentators believe that this call to ambassadorship is specifically about Paul and the other apostles,²⁹ Keene disagrees in his extrapolation off of the work of NT Wright.

But if this is true, then the role of ambassadorship should be seen as applying to all who (i) appear before the judgement seat of Christ, (ii) know the fear of the Lord, (iii) are ones for whom the Lord died, who recognize this fact and therefore live for Christ, (iv) who is in Christ, and (v) have been reconciled to God through Christ. This is clearly meant to include those to whom Paul is writing. Those to whom they are going are all who need reconciliation to God, the all for whom one had died but who were not yet in Christ.³⁰

If we were to believe that this call to ambassadorship was intended for the apostles alone, we would have to believe that the importance of this call to reconciliation died off along with the last of the apostles. Knowing that it has not, and that the need for the sharing of the message of reconciliation has not ended, we must consider this ambassadorship to be extended to the whole priesthood of believers. Knowing this, it is important that we understand what Paul means by referring to us as “ambassadors for Christ.”³¹ Anglican Bishop and theologian Joseph Barber Lightfoot described the nature of ambassadorship the following way:

²⁹ Furnish, *2nd Corinthians*, 350.

³⁰ Timothy Keene, “A Missional Reading of 2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2; Especially 5:21,” *Transformation* 30, no. 3 (2013): 169-81, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0265378813490471>.

³¹ 2 Cor. 5:20 (NRSV).

The ambassador, before acting, receives a commission from the power for whom he acts. The ambassador, while acting, acts not only as an agent, but as a representative of his sovereign. Lastly, the ambassador's duty is not merely to deliver a definite message, to carry out a definite policy; but he is obliged to watch opportunities, to study characters, to cast about for expedients, so that he may place it before his hearers in its most attractive form. He is a diplomatist.³²

One of the main elements of the ambassadorship to remember, as we unpack both this verse and Bishop Lightfoot's comment, is the nature of our relationship as ambassador to the sovereign whom we represent. The first thing Bishop Lightfoot points out is that the ambassador receives a commission from the sovereign before he or she ever acts. This could be a reading of this passage in second Corinthians, the commission to God's people, communicated through one of the apostles. This commission is important, because the ambassador is not working on his or her own behalf or bringing his or her own message. The ambassador is liable to bring the message of the one who sends them. Therefore, we are responsible as ambassadors of Christ to bring the message of reconciliation to others as it was given to us by Christ.

The remainder of Lightfoot's statement gets at the other important element of ambassadorship, that of representation. The ambassador is not simply a courier for a message, bringing the words of the sovereign and leaving them with the recipient. The ambassador represents the sovereign, charged with speaking and acting on the sovereign's behalf. This means that our words and our actions, when acting as a representative of Christ, reflect on Christ. We cannot simply bring the message of reconciliation, we must also live it, lest we communicate to the unsaved that the message

³² J.B. Lightfoot, *Ordination Addresses and Counsels to Clergy* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1890), 48.

is only words. As Lightfoot says, we are diplomats of a sort. Our job is to communicate the message as completely and efficiently as we can, requiring us to be sensitive to how our actions, attitudes, and even tone can affect how the message is received.

The final verse of this passage moves away from the ministry of reconciliation and to the message itself. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”³³ This is the nature of the ministry of reconciliation. It is the way in which the reconciliation is possible, and it is the heart of the message that we are supposed to share. That God took the only human who had not broken the covenant, and through Him, affected a reconciliation for the sins of all mankind. Not only this, but it was not for God’s sake. It was for ours.

In this final verse of the passage, Paul uses a three-phase style for the story of Christ that is reminiscent to the way he puts it in Philippians 2:5-11. “The three phases are represented in 5:21: Phase 1 is the portrait of Christ as the one who did not know sin; phase 2 is Christ’s being made (by God) sin on behalf of believers; and phase 3 is expressed in the purpose clause “in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him.””³⁴³⁵ It is in this threefold story that we see the movement from our being distanced from God to our own reconciliation with God. It must begin with Christ’s innocence, so that it might end with ours.

³³ 2 Cor 5:21 (NRSV).

³⁴ Author’s own paraphrase of 2 Cor 5:21.

³⁵ Keck, New Interpreter’s Bible, 96.

Furnish explains that the term “knew no sin”³⁶ is distinctly Pauline³⁷ and is in reference to practical knowledge³⁸. We can take this to mean experience with sin, involvement in the commission of sin. Specifically, this is not a cognitive term, but one of experience, showing that while Christ was acquainted with the sin of others, He had never transgressed the law. This is also a likely callback to the Suffering Servant from Isaiah, “although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.”³⁹ In this way, Paul establishes that Christ is the Suffering Servant, the Messiah from Isaiah.

It is this innocent Messiah who was made to “be sin,” as Paul puts it. While several translations have rendered this as “a sin offering,” Furnish believes this to be unlikely, because the idea of a sin offering was not contextual to the Corinthians⁴⁰ and importing a foreign element would only confuse readers. Therefore, he suggests that it is more likely that Paul is saying that Christ was made to be sin “in the sense that he was made to bear the burden of sin.”⁴¹ This is a concept that Paul expresses elsewhere in his letters,⁴² using traditional ideas of atonement to explain the gospel.

Keene reflects on the fact that, in verse 21, we do not take on *Christ’s* righteousness, but God’s.⁴³ This seems at odds with the traditional protestant idea of the

³⁶ 2 Cor. 5:21 (NRSV).

³⁷ Rom 3:20; 7:7. (NRSV).

³⁸ Furnish, *2nd Corinthians*, 339.

³⁹ Isa 53:9b (NRSV).

⁴⁰ Furnish, *2nd Corinthians*, 340.

⁴¹ Furnish, *2nd Corinthians*, 351.

⁴² Gal 3:13 and Rom 8:3. (NRSV).

⁴³ Keene, *Missional Reading*, 173.

transfer of righteousness between Christ and us. Furnish suggests that this terminology serves a couple of purposes for Paul. Firstly, that it is used in reference to Jewish apocalyptic literature, but also that it is in direct reference to “the power by which God establishes the covenant and maintains his faithfulness to it.”⁴⁴ This reading of the verse functions well with the covenantal element of the “ministry of reconciliation.” While it is through the person of Christ that we are offered reconciliation, it is God’s own righteousness that both created the covenant and now amends it.

Summary and Application to Project

A complete and nuanced understanding of this passage is necessary for any individual or church looking to undertake ministry with LGBTQIA+ individuals because of the long and painful history of marginalization by the church of these individuals. Because of this history, many LGBTQIA+ individuals actively avoid the Church and anything they associate with it, viewing the Church as a place of judgement and hatred. A place where the hardest thing they had ever done, choosing to be true to their own self, is viewed as something reprehensible. Often, even churches professing to be “welcoming” are welcoming in the respect that they desire for LGBTQIA+ people to come to their church so that “God can fix them.”

Doing effective ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population requires that the individual and the church be willing to not only look past the sexuality and gender identity, but actually embrace that element of the people to whom they wish to minister. This requires an understanding of one of the core elements of reconciliation, meeting the

⁴⁴ Furnish, *2nd Corinthians*, 340.

person where they are at. This not only means—for those who subscribe to a theology that believes homosexuality is a sin—recognizing that the sins of others are not our specific concern, but also that we cannot enter into a beneficial relationship with someone when we come to it with an imbalance of power.

In Fresh Expressions, relationship is at the core of effective ministry. Much like Raining’s view of the meaning of the term ambassador,⁴⁵ Fresh Expressions does not enter into a context with a sense that one culture is superior to another. The core idea behind Fresh Expressions is to create ministries that are contextual, authentic and relatable to those who are part of the context where ministry is happening. This is impossible if the context is addressed from an outsider’s perspective or with an inherent judgement that some element must change. A good example being Tattoo Parlor Church⁴⁶ and the Leviticus 19:28 command against tattoos. Attempting to start a Tattoo Parlor Church from the perspective that tattoos are inherently sinful and the purpose of the church will be to convince the attendees not to get any more tattoos would be disingenuous and ultimately harmful to any chance at bringing the attendees into a relationship with Christ.

Tizon speaks to different elements of reconciliation, stating the importance of horizontal reconciliation that he defines as being “peacemaking, between people and people.”⁴⁷ He goes on to state that “lest we think that the misguided prioritization of

⁴⁵ Raining, *Revisiting the Rite*, 12.

⁴⁶ A Fresh Expression wherein a church meets inside a local tattoo parlor, usually among people who already have several tattoos and feel judged by the inherited church for it.

⁴⁷ Al Tizon, R.P. DeBorst, and R. Sider, *Whole and Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 173.

evangelism over justice speaks only of the colonial past, horizontal sin committed by vertically reconciled Christians continues to this day,”⁴⁸ before pointing out several examples of latent racism hiding under the guise of contextualization. It is a similarly misguided focus on ministry being about life change rather than about cultivating relationships—both between individuals and between the individuals and Christ—that leads many to create ministries with marginalized people that ascribe to some of the very views or practices that harmed the marginalized population in the first place.

This gets at the nature of reconciliation as love, as discussed earlier. A ministry based in love rather than results will look and feel dramatically different. Most evangelization—based on the view that the best way you can love someone is by saving them—uses tactics of manipulation. A combination of logical and emotional appeal is used to try and elicit a conversion from the individual. By comparison, ministries rooted in love like Fresh Expressions have a longer view. Relationships are built and maintained regardless of whether one converts. It is the hope of these ministries that through these relationships some life change might eventually happen, but that the lives of those we minister to will be improved by the relationship either way.

If we truly understand both Fresh Expressions and our ministry of reconciliation, we have a profound opportunity to step into a loving and effective ministry with members of the LGBTQIA+ population. By loving individuals in this community for who they are, embracing them as brothers and sisters in Christ, we can begin to reconcile some of the damage done by churches in the past. The clearing of this damage, often acting as a stumbling block between the individual and Christ, can lead to the individual entering

⁴⁸ Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled*, 175.

into the kind of heartfelt relationship with God where we can trust the Holy Spirit to convict the individual and lead them toward sanctification, whatever that process looks like for them.

Understanding, therefore, our ambassadorial duties and the nature of our “ministry of reconciliation,” allows us to enter into a more genuine, loving, and contextual ministry. Among a population so often jaded with the church, this kind of ministry can reach those who are not currently attending church because of fears of judgement, harassment, or prejudice. By showing love and grace, we can enter into the “ministry of reconciliation” and become effective ambassadors of Christ. We will see this kind of ministry of reconciliation in action in the next chapter as we look into the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a result of discrimination of the African American members of St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

In this chapter I will be exploring the background and formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a denomination separate from the Methodist denomination of its day. Specifically, this chapter will be focusing on how the marginalization of the African American Methodists by the white Methodists that surrounded them led to the creation of this new denomination. It will look at how the new denomination grew to represent the specific needs and experiences of the African American population, accomplishing what the larger Methodist Episcopal Church could not and would not by adequately reflecting the experiences of that marginalized people group—in this case the African American population. Finally, it will also focus on how the denomination's specific focus on the needs and experiences of a marginalized people group allowed for growth among a population that had avoided the mainstream Churches of its day due to the experience of marginalization.

It will then connect the experiences surrounding the formation and initial growth of the African Methodist Episcopal Church with the experiences of LGBTQIA+ Christians today with regard to their marginalization by the mainstream Church. I will connect how the marginalization of the African American population leading to the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church connects with the opportunity of Fresh Expressions to create safe worship spaces for LGBTQIA+ Christians. I will

additionally draw connections between the ways in which the African Methodist Episcopal Church created a culture specifically for African Americans to the opportunities these Fresh Expressions have to address the felt needs and expressed interests common to the LGBTQIA+ population to which they will be ministering.

Before continuing, I want it said clearly that I am not attempting to draw an equalizing line between the experiences of African Americans in historical America and the contemporary experiences of the LGBTQIA+ population. It would be both inaccurate and insensitive to try and connect any contemporary experiences with the enslavement, torture, and systematic disenfranchisement that the African American people experienced for much of our country's history. That said, from the roots of such hardship, a beautiful and powerful institution grew in the form of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and its eventual offshoot. It is merely my hope that, learning from that institution, we can create for another marginalized group a powerful and affirming organization of faith.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church did not originate in a vacuum, but with a people who had grown tired of being marginalized and excluded in their place of worship. The story begins at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in late 1791 or early 1792.¹ "One Sunday morning in the early 1790s, the black members of St. George's learned to their surprise that they could not sit in the benches they normally used to. Instead, they were ordered to sit upstairs in a balcony that had recently been added at the rear of the church."²

¹ Historians have been unable to settle on a specific date for this event.

² Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23.

This indignity alone was not enough to cause an uproar, as the presence of this balcony was something that the African American members had contributed toward alongside their white counterparts as part of a capitol campaign. The outrage came when a little while later, an older African American gentleman named Absalom Jones was praying at the front. He was asked to move to the balcony and merely asked to be allowed to finish his prayer first. White members physically lifted Jones from his knees. Following the culmination of that prayer, Jones and the other black worshippers left St. George's.³

While this treatment of Absalom Jones was far from the first indignity that the African American worshippers had experienced at the hands of their white counterparts, it was the last straw. At this time the racism of the white church members had begun to directly come between the African American members and their practicing of their faith. It was no longer an issue of segregated seating and diminished opportunities for service, but one in which an African American could not pray at the altar without fear of being accosted by white members. It was then that they decided to form their own congregation.

The feelings and experiences of the African American members, following the walk-out of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church are articulated in a letter written by Richard Allen, Daniel Coker, and James Champion preserved in the *Doctrines and Disciplines of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*:

In this undertaking, we met with great opposition from an elder of the Methodist church (J McC.) who threatened, that if we did not give up the building, erase our names

³ Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 23.

from the subscription paper, and make acknowledgements for having attempted such a thing, that in three months' time we should all be publicly expelled from the Methodist society. Not considering ourselves bound to obey this injunction, and being fully satisfied that we should be treated without mercy, we sent in our resignations.⁴

When the building was finished, Bishop Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal Church opened the new church, now named Bethel. As so often happens in conflicts between people with privilege and people without, the attempts to reconcile included no efforts towards redress of the actual issues. Instead, it took the form of coercion and use of power. While the issue with Absalom Jones was only the last straw, it is notable that the documents mention no statement on the part of the white members towards permitting the African American members to pray at the front as long as they continued to sit in the back. The lack of even such nominal attempts at redress show that the white members were so self-assured of their own “rightness” that they could not imagine having to compromise in order to resolve the situation.

It should not be overlooked that St. George's had a monetary reason for attempting to make the African American members return. While the African American members would undoubtedly have been making far less than their white counterparts, the loss of their tithes would undoubtedly be felt by the church. Therefore, despite the white membership wanting to relegate the African American members to a place where they could remain unseen, they did not want to lose the money that came with them. This idea, the African American members building their own congregation, threatened exactly that.

⁴ Richard Allen, Daniel Coker, and James Champion, “To the Members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, in the United States of America,” in *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 3.

This overriding concern is evidenced in not only the Methodist Elder's attempt to prevent the African American members from obtaining their own building, but also in the events that followed the resignation of the African American members from the Methodist society.

It was now proposed by the resident elder, (J. McC.) that we should have the Church incorporated, that we might receive any donation or legacy, as well as enjoy other advantages arising therefrom. This was agreed to; and, in order to save expense, the elder proposed drawing it up for us. But, we soon found he had done it in such a manner as entirely deprived us of that liberty we expected to enjoy. So that by this stratagem, we were again brought into bondage by the white preachers.⁵

What is important to note here is that, while expulsion from the Methodist society was the stated consequence if the African Americans did not stop what they were doing, it was not the endgame for the white Methodists. Had expulsion been where the white members' interest in the African American Methodists ended, the local elder would not have seen the need to involve himself any further. Certainly, had expulsion been sufficient to resolve the situation, he would not have drafted the incorporation of the Bethel in such a way as to ensure the white church retained control.

Allen and his co-authors go on to explain that in the time that followed, they were told that the house and the papers it contained belonged to the Methodist conference, and they could no longer have services without the permission of the elder. Ultimately, they had to consult a lawyer to resolve the problem, with the whole ordeal lasting ten years. Having finally won autonomy, the issue of finding someone to officiate and preach

⁵ Allen, Coker, and Champion, *To the Members*, 4-5.

became the chosen battlefield for the white Methodists. First this came in the form of the expected annual payment before the Methodist conference dictated that no Methodist preacher could preach for this African American church without risking his credentials. All of this was done in an attempt to get the African American Methodists to rescind the legal supplement granting them autonomy.⁶

The plight of those involved in the creation of Bethel was not unique. Shortly after a white elder failed to get the Supreme Court to issue a writ of Mandamus, which would force Bethel to allow the white elder to preach there, they received word of a similar situation in Baltimore. Over time, more and more African American congregations began to form, necessitating the creation of a new structure to support these new Methodist churches. Therefore, a meeting was called, featuring delegates from various African American Methodist churches, at which it was decided that they would together form the African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁷

This new denomination understood its demographic and the needs of those who would become members, and so it grew. “While Richard Allen believed in a color-blind Christianity, he also embraced a heightened black consciousness.”⁸ So while the African Methodist Episcopal Church was not itself a segregated institution, open to Christians of all races and ethnicities, it held as a cornerstone the black experience in America. One

⁶ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2009), 162.

⁷ Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 91.

⁸ Dennis C Dickerson, “Richard Allen and the Rise of African Methodism in the Atlantic World, 1760–1831,” in *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 30.

example of this was the emphasis in the new denomination's polity that they would not receive in membership anybody who is slaveholder and requiring any slaveholders in current membership to emancipate them. This was not fundamentally different than the written polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church but was enforced by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in a way that the white church was unwilling to do.⁹

This served not only a practical purpose—with black worshippers unlikely to feel comfortable or safe alongside those who held as property people who looked like them—but also a theological one. The new denomination held as central to its theological understanding of the Bible that the texts speaking of Jesus delivering people from slavery was not solely in reference to sin. Instead, these references were viewed as referring to breaking the bonds of both sin and literal slavery.¹⁰ Therefore one could not worship the God who delivers while being the one holding people in bondage.

“Moreover, Allen and his followers, according to a black British theologian, Anthony G. Reddie, differed from white Christians who emphasized “believing in Jesus” while black Christians put stress on “following him.””¹¹ This difference between orthopraxy (right doing) and orthodoxy (right belief) came to encapsulate much of what would differentiate the African Methodist Episcopal Church from its predecessor. While Methodism had always had a focus on sanctification, it had come to have a more individualistic flavor. For Allen and the African Methodists, issues like slavery and black degradation were a part of this push toward sanctification, pushing for a “renewal of

⁹ Dickerson, “Rise of African Methodism,” 51.

¹⁰ Dickerson, “Rise of African Methodism,” 51.

¹¹ Dickerson, “Rise of African Methodism,” 34.

society, pursued through the destruction of slavery and other forms of human exploitation.”¹²

Allen and Coker viewed this new church they were creating as an institutional challenge to slavery and black degradation.¹³ Bishop Payne is quoted as saying, “But slavery is a system based upon injustice, born of violence and blood, hence it knows not what is mercy or justice.”¹⁴ Not only would the institution be standing up to the practice of slavery by speaking out against it and refusing membership to slaveholders, but the mere existence of a church run by African Americans stood against the central claims of black degradation. Those who wished to view African Americans as inherently less than their white counterparts would be faced with the reality of an African Methodist denomination, teaching liberation and equality in the face of racism and segregation.

Beyond the denial of membership to slaveholders, the new denomination was designed with a mind toward the experience of the African American. Not only did the African Methodist Episcopal Church’s hymnody surround a liberationist ethos, but it also showed an openness to black cultural idioms that had not been seen in the white Methodist church.¹⁵ This made it clear who the dominant audience of this new denomination was. White worshippers would be welcomed, but just as the African Americans had been expected to exist in an institution of white idioms and culture while

¹² Dickerson, “Rise of African Methodism,” 38.

¹³ The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Nashville, TN: AMEC Sunday School Union, 2017), 101.

¹⁴ James A Handy, *Scraps of African Methodist Episcopal History* (Alexandria, VA: Chadwyck-Healey, 1987), 69.

¹⁵ Dickerson, “Rise of African Methodism,” 52.

inside the Methodist Episcopal Church, white worshippers in the new denomination would have to become acquainted to black idioms and culture.

“Allen believed that an autonomous African institution was foundational to any effort to advance the interests of blacks in the Atlantic World.”¹⁶ This sentiment had two equally important elements. The autonomy of the institution, and its African-ness. Allen had already been shown by the actions of the Methodist Episcopal Church elders in Philadelphia that autonomy was the only way for the African American Methodists to gain any respect or control over their own processes. When under the yoke of the Methodist Episcopal Church, it was always a battle with the intention of once again placing the African American Methodists back in the subservient and segregated position from which they came. The white Methodists wanted the tithes and attendance of the African Methodists, but without wanting to interact with or share authority with them in any way.

There would, however, be very little value in an autonomous organization that was not distinctly African. If the new denomination were to match the dominant culture, Allen and Coker would have been creating just another church designed to appeal to the white Christian. What was lacking, Allen and Coker recognized, was a form of church designed by and for the African American culture. A kind of church where the idioms and culture of the black population was considered normal, and the average worshipper did not need to translate their behavior and language to be accepted.

Even the hymnody of the African Methodist Episcopal Church different intentionally from that of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1801, instead of continuing

¹⁶ Dickerson, “Rise of African Methodism,” 39.

to use the hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Richard Allen put together a hymnal titled *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns, Selected from Various Authors*.

Eileen Southern explains in her research on this hymnal its immense importance:

...it is the first published black denominational hymnal; it is the very first published hymnbook to include the “wandering chorus”—unrelated choruses freely attached to one or more hymns; it is the first hymnbook to include songs of the oral tradition (pieces that Allen probably picked up while preaching on the circuit); and it is a document that reflects the musical taste of early nineteenth-century black Protestants.¹⁷

While it would have been easier for Allen and Coker to continue using the Methodist hymnal, perhaps creating their own near-identical printing to avoid legal issues, they chose to go a different route. Instead, Allen put together a brand-new hymnal that reflected the African American people. It included songs that would have been taught, one slave to another, to pass the time on plantations. Songs that brought hope in the midst of enslavement, reminding them that God wishes liberation for God’s people. These songs, many of which had not been included in official Church hymnody before, were spiritually important to the African American people.

Along with these spirituals, the hymnal included a musical element rooted back to the oral tradition of the enslaved, the “wandering chorus.” These elements, born out of improvisation, were familiar choruses and refrains that were often added to other hymns. While this practice was common among African American worshipping communities, it had never been made “official” in a hymnal before. While not only being a historical first, this is another sign that Allen and Coker’s new denomination was aimed at

¹⁷ Eileen Southern, “Hymnals of the Black Church,” *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Seminary*, 14, nos. 1 & 2 (Fall 1986-Spring 1987), 127.

representing African Americans and the culture they had cultivated. Instead of a prescriptive idea of a hymnal, telling people what was acceptable for worship, Allen represented what was already being used for worship in the hymnal he created.

Beyond the inclusion of songs and elements rooted in the oral tradition, it is important to note this as being a document representative of the musical tastes of that population.¹⁸ This is important, because this is not some historical selection of songs, old enough to be venerated as “traditional” spiritual songs. These were the songs that were of contemporary taste, the songs that the population would be singing to themselves while working or relaxing together. Unlike the Methodist Episcopal hymnal, which would have contained many hymns considered old even in 1801, this was truly representative of the contemporary tastes of the people.

Another notable element of the hymnody of the early African Methodist Episcopal Church was the degree to which it represented the liberation themes inherent in the formation of the denomination. As the hymnal aged and new volumes were created, like most hymnals, the contents became less rooted in popular music and more in a combination of tradition and modern interpretation. In the 1876 volume of the hymnal, this time compiled by H. M. Turner, this included the inclusion of two hymns by W. H. Young under the heading of “Anniversary of Freedom.”¹⁹ The first includes the following lines in its first verse:

¹⁸ Frederick Hilborn Talbot, *African American Worship: New Eyes for Seeing* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 110.

¹⁹ Jon Michael Spencer, "The Hymnody of the African Methodist Episcopal Church," *American Music* 8, no. 3 (1990): 280-281.

All hail! Fair Freedom's morn,
 When Afric's sons were born,
 We bless this day.
 From slavery we are freed,
 No more our hearts will bleed—
 Lord, make us free indeed.
 To Thee we pray.²⁰

This hymn mixes the theological roots of a hymn with the politic nature of a national anthem, seemingly based off of the song *America*, to craft something that is truly representative of the experience and perspective of black Americans at that moment in history, shortly following the Civil War. While things were not entirely resolved, with reconstruction being essentially aborted in 1877 and the Civil Rights movement taking until the late 1960s to win for African Americans the same rights their white counterparts enjoyed, there was a sense of hope and promise.

As anybody who has ever tried to modify the services of an older church can attest to, worship itself is one of the things not only most representative of a body but also most fiercely protected. In the same way, the worship of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was truly representative of a dynamic and changing population of African Americans, beginning with their first steps into independent organized religion, through the liberation-minded post-Civil War days, to the Civil Rights era, and beyond.

Worship does not end with the music, however. Another element of the African American worship experience that was empowered and emboldened by the new

²⁰ Spencer, "Hymnody of the AME Church," 281.

denomination was the distinctive style of African American preaching. While not monolithic, there are distinct styles of preaching found within the African American population that are largely missing from the white church. Miniffee describes the performative nature of the African American preacher's delivery of the message and how it connects back to African cultural influences: "Such performances are reminiscent of African religious customs and worship styles, where rhythmic inflections and tonalities of the spiritual leader's voice, accompanied by drum beats, invoke spirits in the listeners, causing them to dance and fall into convulsions."²¹ While less dramatic than the responses to the traditional African religious customs, this rhythmic preaching style and the tonal inflections of the preacher did evoke an emotional response from the worshippers.

While not all black preachers used this emotive style, it has been and continues to be a distinctly African American preaching style. This style not only preserves the attention of the congregation, drawing them into the message, but it creates an experience out of the worship service. Miniffee speaks of Bishop Allen's style by saying: "Bishop Allen's 'call and response' preaching style, often accompanied by lively music, created an emotive atmosphere that would incite cathartic release, which he believed his African American worshippers needed and expected."²² This form of preaching relied less on rhetorical skill and logical argumentation, instead helping the worshipper to become emotionally invested in the message. This was both effective and reliant on the specific position that the preacher filled in African American society.

²¹ Paul André Miniffee, "Roots of Black Rhetoric : African Methodist Episcopal Zion's Pioneering Preacher-Politicians" (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2008), 17.

²² Miniffee, "Roots of Black Rhetoric," 24.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. DuBois says, “The Negro church of today is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character.”²³ He continues, “The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil.”²⁴ Miniffee goes on to explain the various roles often filled by the preacher in African American society:

At once a spiritual leader, a social-political activist, educator, idealist, and businessman, the antebellum black preacher was the idiosyncratic product of a soil contaminated with racism and sullied with hate... As shepherd and statesman, the black preacher embodied the values and talents representative of the potential of his people and set the standards for community investment and civic action.²⁵

Because the Church was the first institution that the African American had for his or herself, it has always been at the center of African American culture. In a world where everything centered around the white man, the African American church so represented the identity of the black American that the leadership of the church became the leaders of the African American community in America. Especially in those early days, when opportunities for black Americans were limited, the preacher represented the professional among African Americans. Often educated, either formally or through apprenticeship, the preacher served as not only spiritual guidance but the voice for a whole community.

Because the church was the center of community for the African American people, the pulpit became a place not only for sermons but also for politics. Preachers, acting as both the spiritual leaders and moral guides of their communities, would tackle the various issues facing their communities. Commonly preachers in the early days of the

²³ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York, NY: New American Library, 1969), 221.

²⁴ DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 219.

²⁵ Miniffee, “Roots of Black Rhetoric,” vii.

African Methodist Episcopal Church would speak of comfortably of God alongside topics of abolition, temperance, social resistance, and moral reforms.²⁶ A talented and effective preacher was equally competent at getting to the moral heart of the congregation and inspiring them to stand in action.

What could initially have been described as a blurring of the lines between the spiritual and the political became an intentional blending as the laws limiting the rights of African Americans became more and more strict.

Protest eventually led to political organization—and again the church played a central role. An increase in the number of laws discriminating against blacks led black leaders to believe that they needed to form some national movement to fight for their rights. In response, the first of a series of national Negro conventions met in 1830 at Bethel Church in Philadelphia with Bishop Richard Allen acting as Chair.²⁷

This meeting would lead to the formation of the American Society of Free Persons of Color, a predecessor of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This group, rooted firmly in the African American church, would be the backbone of the organized resistance against the discriminatory laws and practices that plagued African Americans.

In the first decade of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, education was a major issue not only among the ministers, but also the congregations themselves. Payne writes in the early 1800s about the challenges facing the early African Methodist Episcopal Church regarding literacy and education of its people:

²⁶ Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 28.

²⁷ Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 30-31.

The education of the colored population of the states in which the majority of the members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church were located was strictly forbidden. The laws framed by the various state legislatures were so stringent, and the penalties so severe, that we at this present day can only look back at them and shudder.²⁸

Because many of the states in which the African Methodist Episcopal Church had formed were those in which formal education of African Americans was illegal, the new denomination had to be careful about the kinds of offerings it provided. However, anywhere there are books, there is an opportunity for literacy. Because of this, despite the lack of formalized education in reading and writing provided to the congregants of these early churches, the church itself provided an informal opportunity for many of them to begin learning how to read. In this way, the early African Methodist Episcopal Church provided for its people not only the center of their spiritual and communal lives, but also the opportunity for education.

Raboteau does a great job of encapsulating the importance of the African American Church in general, with the African Methodist Episcopal Church being the first organized denomination, in the life of African American communities:

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century the independent black churches took on a variety of crucial roles. As sources of moral uplift, agencies of economic cooperation, arenas for political action, promoters of education, and houses of refuge in a hostile white world, the churches stood at the center of African-American community life.²⁹

The African American church came to reflect the identity and experience of the African American population to such a degree that it naturally became the rallying point

²⁸ Daniel Alexander Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the A. M. E. Sunday School Union, 1801), 53-54.

²⁹ Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 36.

for meeting the needs of the community. The church became the hub through which all aspects of African American community life flowed, empowering, educating, and pushing the African American community to fight for equality. It was specifically because of the church's separation from the mainstream, white church that it was able to accomplish these things. It could only be the center of the African American community by being thoroughly African American. Because of this, the African Methodist Episcopal Church continued to grow and expand, empowering a larger African American church movement.

It is here that I believe we can begin to draw connections not only to the contemporary situation of the LGBTQIA+ population with regard to the mainstream, hetero-normative church, but also envision a future that is possible through the creation of intentional spaces designed for the culture, identity, and needs of another marginalized people. In doing so through the vehicle of Fresh Expressions, we have the opportunity to create such a space within the organization of the mainstream church, before we lose the opportunity and a significant demographic entirely.

Within the mainstream Church there are levels of welcome experienced by LGBTQIA people, most of them some degree of marginalization. Some churches take the "don't ask, don't tell" approach to LGBTQIA inclusion, wherein the onus is on the LGBTQIA individual to hide their identity if they want to be accepted. These are churches that, if someone is openly LGBTQIA, they are either outright shunned or treated in a manner that would reasonably lead the individual to find a different place to worship. From these unwelcoming churches there exists a spectrum, but in all but the

most affirming of churches, there exists some experience of being marginalized by the LGBTQIA individuals.

Sometimes this “otherizing” is not intentional but is because the culture of the church is heteronormative. Because of this, simply the experience of being something other than heterosexual makes the individual visible in his or her difference from the norm. Other times this can be because of stereotypes, whether harmful or largely benign, that lead to untrue assumptions. Regardless of the reason or the form, it is rare for an LGBTQIA individual to enter a mainstream church and feel anything but visibly different for his or her identity. This looks a lot like how the African American population found the predominantly white Methodist Episcopal Church. Regardless of whether they were being specifically marginalized, as often they were, the culture of the church was designed by and for white people. Because of this, they were also visibly “other.”

While some are willing to enter this space, committed to the growth and evolution of the mainline church, there are others who simply do not have the energy or desire. This can easily become a barrier for entry, as now the individual must contend with not only the normal social pressures of meeting new people, integrating with a church, and practicing or engaging with their faith, but now they must do so while being constantly vigilant. Inevitably, for some, this is one too many things to expect of them.

This is one of the areas where a Fresh Expression can come in. In a Fresh Expression designed for and around the LGBTQIA population, a space would exist where an individual can feel safe to explore and practice his or her spirituality without the additional element of feeling “othered” for being visibly non-straight or non-cisgendered. This removes a major barrier for entry, allowing more of the LGBTQIA community to

feel comfortable stepping into a church space. Additionally, while not the goal of a Fresh Expression, this opens the door for individuals involved in the LGBTQIA-focused Fresh Expression to feel more comfortable becoming involved in the inherited church's original services.

Another element of welcoming that is sometimes lost is opportunity. While some churches officially forbid LGBTQIA individuals from serving in certain capacities, for others there is simply an informal barrier to opportunity. Whether it is being passed over for an opportunity or simply feeling reticent to even reach out for opportunities, the experience of feeling different can lead to the LGBTQIA individual being less involved in the life of the church. This is a missed opportunity not only for the individual, but also for the church, who loses out on whatever skills or perspective the individual could bring to the table.

Again, connections can be drawn to the experiences of African Americans in those pre-Civil War days. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear to see that there were and continue to be brilliant and charismatic black preachers, perhaps most popularly exemplified by Martin Luther King Jr. As just one example among many, the white church has missed out on the particular giftings of African Americans due to marginalization. We similarly risk missing great minds among the LGBTQIA community due to marginalization.

Again, this is where the experience of the Fresh Expression is different. In a way perhaps even greater than the inherited church, Fresh Expressions are lay led. With one clergy person, it would be impossible for a church to have a Sunday service and several Fresh Expressions without significant involvement from the laity. Because the concept of

this particular Fresh Expressions is designed to make the LGBTQIA individual feel like the targeted demographic and not the “other,” the social barriers to involvement that exist within the inherited church are removed. This gives a greater degree of opportunity for the LGBTQIA members, benefitting not only the Fresh Expression, but likely flowing over into the inherited church in the form of fresh perspectives and new ideas.

If our goal is to bring individuals into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and we truly believe that we should not put reconditions on those relationships, a Fresh Expression is perhaps the easiest way for an existing church to enter into effective and loving ministry with the LGBTQIA community. We will explore in the next chapter how these small communities can form through a theological process Leonardo Boff calls ecclesiogenesis.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

When discussing the ecclesiological basis for Fresh Expressions, in particular the ways in which it differs from the organization of the inherited church, strong support for intentional and contextualized communities of faith are found in Leonardo Boff's concept of ecclesigenesis. Through this, Boff is painting the picture of a new kind of church, one that does not center around the parish or the clergy person. Instead, these base communities as he calls them¹ are built around groups of laity who gather around worship and sharing the word of God. These communities are not intended to replace the parish church, but are elements of the Church universal that help to expand and revitalize it.

In the following pages, this text will explain the understanding of Boff and other theologians that the result of this ecclesigenesis, these base communities, are appropriately called church. It will then explain how these base communities serve as a form of revitalization for the inherited church, how these communities act as a form of liberation for many marginalized laity, and how they can influence the inherited church. Finally, this text will make plain the connection between this ecclesigenesis, these "base communities," and Fresh Expressions generally before explaining the connect to the specific doctoral project.

¹ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesigenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent The Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), chap. 2.

Ecclesiogenesis Defined

Boff defines the term ecclesiogenesis by saying, “We are not dealing with the expansion of an existing ecclesiastical system, rotating on a sacramental, clerical axis, but with the emergence of another form of being church, rotating on the axis of the word and the laity.”² In this way Boff speaks of creating something new that we can recognize as “the Church” while looking and in some cases behaving significantly differently than the existing ecclesiastical systems. These base communities, as Boff calls the new forms of church, differ from the existing systems of church in many ways that reflect their genesis from among the laity and not the clergy.

Lewis Mudge, in his book *Rethinking the Beloved Community* gives a slightly different reason for the creation of these new church communities:

I argue that this is a paradigm for ecclesiogenesis. The formation of churches always involves some sort of discernment of the Spirit’s work in the world and an attempt to manifest that work in visible forms of life. With sufficient vision, the churches may come to see that the Spirit’s people-forming work is larger and more inclusive than anything they can possibly represent with their own resources. Hence becoming the church does not mean making exclusive claims. It means prophetic decipherment on the one hand, and live signification on the other. I maintain that this is essentially an exegetical or interpretive process which leads to the building and constant re-forming of the visible church in the midst of the world.³

While Boff is focusing on the specific situation in Brazil, and therefore the dominant issue of insufficient clergy, leading to the need for lay leadership, Mudge casts the net wider. Mudge explains that the formation of churches always involves a need

² Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 1.

³ Lewis S. Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, Social Theory* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2001), 163.

being met that had not been met before. In Brazil's case, that needs was insufficient clergy, but Mudge contends that inclusivity is always an element of the work being done. Sometimes it is the inclusion of a people who were marginalized, either formally or informally, by the existing church. The full inclusion of the poor and disinherited to serve the church. Other times it is geographic locations or cultures unreached by the existing planted churches. Regardless of where the Spirit is aiming for inclusion, there are a few elements of these base communities that are commonly the same.

Firstly, these base communities are often run not by clergy but instead by the laity themselves. This spawned from a shortage of clergy with many worshippers wishing for some manner of church.⁴

In 1956 Dom Agnelo Rossi initiated an evangelization movement, using lay catechists, for regions of Brazil not being reached by pastors. It all began with the lament of one humble old woman: "Christmas Eve, all three Protestant churches were lit up and full of people. We could hear them singing. . . . And the Catholic church, closed and dark! ... Because we can't get a priest." A question hung in the air. If there are no priests, must everything grind to a halt? At this juncture, Dom Agnelo, in Barra do Pirai, decided to train community coordinators "to do everything a lay person can do in God's church in current ecclesiastical discipline. At the least, these catechists will gather the people once a week for religious instruction. Normally they will also celebrate daily prayer with the people. On Sundays and Holy Days they will gather the people from all over the district for a 'Massless Sunday,' or 'priestless Mass,' or 'Catholic worship,' and lead them spiritually and collectively in the same Mass as is being celebrated by the pastor in the

⁴ Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 1.

distant mother church. They will recite morning and evening prayers with the people, as well as novenas, litanies, May and June celebrations, and so on.⁵

Because they did not have a clergy person, these communities would look different than a traditional Catholic Mass. Most notably, there would be no celebration of Communion, as the sacraments required an ordained clergyperson. What they could accomplish on their own, however, was nearly everything else that went into a Catholic service. They could study the scriptures, either through a Bible study or a homily, worship, and pray together. It is precisely because of these commonalities and differences with the existing forms of church that there is argument about whether these base communities are actually church.

Father Alfonso Gregory gives the following reasons in a study carried about by the Centro de Estatísticas Religiosas e Investigação Social (CERIS), as to why these base communities are properly called church:

1. "Because it is founded on the common faith, and its objectives bear on a deepening and an increase of this faith, with all that this implies."
2. "Because there is a direct connection with the ecclesiastical frame-work, a sense of church of-the-people." Or, as another respondent put it: "Because it feels its oneness with the parish, diocese, and church universal."
3. "Because in religious activities only Catholics participate, while other activities are ecumenical" —that is, socioeconomic activities. Here we may add what another respondent said: "When you consider yourselves a church community, you can't work when your religious motives at different, or opposite."
4. "Because the strictly religious activities are basic, while all the others are as a consequence of accepting God's word." Or again: "Christianity is the activating of integral humanism."
5. "Because we are working at the grassroots for a communion in faith, through humanization."⁶

⁵ Pope Paul VI, in statement appearing in *Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira* 17 (1957:1):731-37.

⁶ Alfonso Gregory, "Dados Preliminares Sobre Experiências de CEB's no Brasil," in *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base: Utopia ou Realidade?* ed. Alfonso Gregory (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1973), 53.

In essence, what Father Gregory appears to be saying in the study is that the base communities are properly church because they share the same goals as church, because it has a connection to the Church universal, and because it exists in the form of community held together by the teachings of Christ. But this question of what constitutes church goes deeper still. In his book *Rethinking the Beloved Community*, Lewis S Mudge considers the concept of the Church as a salvation sign, giving two things one must look for in a church:

What would one look for? Two things above all. Bonhoeffer said that the Church should be “Jesus Christ existing in the form of a community.” One would know such a community by the fact that, given its cultural and social setting, the “sign” of Jesus could be “read” there. ... the kind of signification generated by the community’s comportment in relation to the power realities around it. The Church should convey the “signature” of Jesus Christ through being related redemptively to power the way He was related to power.

Secondly, the congregation that bears the sign of Jesus Christ is one whose behavior conveys “signals” through which members and others are able to see a world of possible action stretching ahead into the future. ... Through the sign of the cross we see, not an end to our possibilities, but rather entirely new possibilities.⁷

Using Mudge and Bonhoeffer’s logic, how we define Church has less to do with the rituals and the sacraments than it does with how the person, ministry, and gospel of Jesus Christ is communicated through the community. This way of viewing the Church, while perhaps novel to some, has the benefit of remaining accurate despite dramatic changes in both the world and the landscape of the Church in recent decades. Mudge continues, pointing out the challenges with defining the Church by ritual and practice alone:

Instead, we face a situation of radical religious pluralism: so much so that we cannot say whether the different expressions of Christian faith across the cultures and across the globe have any single essence. Contextuality rules. Not only does

⁷ Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community*, 139.

Christian faith appear to have radically divergent meanings in different venues, but within Western cultures alone there have appeared theologies representing women, minority groups, groups with special interests, and the like. At this historical juncture, this is as it should be.⁸

It is in Mudge's observation here that we can see the strength and necessity of these base communities and the process of ecclesiogenesis. We live in a world where contextuality is king. In the Church we can see it every day in the battles that are splitting the major denominations, two theological frameworks coming into conflict with one another. Since the beginning of Christianity, there have been contextual conflicts that have divided and defined our boundaries. Whether it is same-sex marriage, ordination of women, racial integration, or the role of the Pope, Christians have long created for ourselves separate enclaves of theological thought. The parish system, creating the concept of the local church further separated us by geographic and socioeconomic distinctions. The process of ecclesiogenesis is nothing new. We have been creating new Church communities to meet our needs since the beginning.

It is notable that in his reasons for the base communities to be rightly called church, Father Gregory ignores the striking differences, notably the inability of most of these base communities to perform the sacraments due to a lack of clergy leadership. Rather than emphasizing on this element being a reason for non-inclusion of the base communities into the definition of church, Father Gregory instead focuses on the connection between the base communities and the other forms of church wherein the sacraments are regularly taken. In this way, Father Gregory opens the door to creative and adaptive models of church within the framework of larger church structures. This

⁸ Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community*, 146.

allows the church to do what was necessary in Brazil, adapt to meet the needs around it using the resources at its disposal. In the case of Brazil, that meant lay-led churches in communities where there were not enough ordained clergy to go around.

This is not to say, however, that the issue of the sacraments in base communities is not something discussed. Dutch missionary and scholar Carlos Mesters, who has spent a substantial amount of time working with the Brazilian “base communities,” argues against this compartmentalism of the sacraments to the ordained clergy:

[We have] the concrete problem of the priest crushed by the weight of sacramentalization. The sacraments pertain to a kind of interior warehouse of the life of the community, and this life may not be allowed to be dependent on the clergy as a class. Without this interior life, the community will never be able to do anything, will never arrive at a real autonomy. The clergy have become a class, and, as a class, have monopolized, accumulated in their own hands, the administration of the sacraments. They have become something like the man with the key to the service station, without being the owner of the station, and have created in the people a consciousness of total dependency on "Father" for the means to get to God. The time has come to eliminate the Operator and set up a direct-dial system for the people. This means (1) that the people will be able to rediscover the sacramental (symbolic) meaning and sense of life; (2) that clericalism (not the ministerial priesthood) will be eliminated from the administration of the sacraments (which is not the same thing as handing it over to trained laity); (3) that the people will be able to become the proprietors of their own sacraments—to run the service station themselves.⁹

Mesters argues that keeping the sacraments in the hands of only those who have been ordained by the Church is putting a block between the people and God. Where we believe, and Catholics like Mesters more so than protestants, that the eucharist is a means of grace and a way to directly commune with God, this regulation requires that an individual have an intermediary between themselves and God. The problem for many is

⁹ C. Mesters, "O Futuro de Nosso Passado," in *Uma Igreja que Nasce do Povo: Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1975), 146.

the theological nature of the eucharist when looked at through the lens of the early Church. Boff strikes at the heart of this issue when he writes, “The Eucharist will no longer be merely an eschatological sign of the imminence of the kingdom. Now, in the time of the church, it will be the community's nourishment, the place where the People of God, by eating the body of Christ, become the body of Christ.”¹⁰

These base communities, or any ecclesial structure that is formed outside of the constraints of the traditional church, faces the same problems of structural limitation. The Bible has a blueprint for what Church looks like, but we have added constraints to it in the name of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This is not an inherently bad thing, but it is called into question when considering the priesthood of all believers.¹¹ Tertullian explicitly asserts, “...Are not we lay people also priests? ... Hence, where there is no such hierarchy, you yourself offer sacrifice, you baptize, and you are your own priest. Obviously, where there are three gathered together, even though they are lay persons, there is a church.”¹² In this way these base communities exist both within and outside of the established structure of the inherited church. In these base communities the priesthood of all believers is taken seriously, with lay people given opportunities and roles often relegated to clergy, but the connection to the Church universal is maintained:

Jesus was, institutionally speaking, a layperson. The son of a carpenter, and although trained in the rabbinic tradition, he was likely not of the priestly caste. The disciples he chose, while some were theologically trained, were not priests either. They were everyday people, fishermen, tax collectors, female entrepreneurs, and tentmakers. Some were “sinners,” and prostitutes too. Most of

¹⁰ Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 5.

¹¹ 1 Peter 2:9 (NRSV).

¹² Tertullian, “An Exhortation to Chastity, ch. 7, v. 3,” in *Tertullian: Treatises on Marriage and Remarriage, Ancient Christian Writers, no. 13* trans. William P. Le Saint (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1951), 53.

them were only teenagers when they left everything to follow Jesus. He cultivated his church outside the religious system of his day. He planted a church in the wild with the people who lived outside of convention. Jesus didn't do the ministry to or for them. He taught them how to do what he was doing. He sent them to cast out demons, heal the sick, and proclaim the kingdom. When the hungry crowds were pressing in, he said to his followers, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). Jesus' "discipleship program" was on-the-job training, not studying religious texts back at the church compound or seminary. He took these ordinary people and turned them into priests to their own social spheres. Jesus' goal was building disciples who would do greater things than he did (John 14:12).¹³

A core connection is the relationship of these base communities with the larger structure of the church, in particular what those in the Fresh Expressions sphere call the inherited church. That is the traditional buildings, congregations, and traditions that we are tasked with caring for while adapting church for the emergent needs in our context. The goal of the base communities or Fresh Expressions is not to supplant or change the inherited church, but to renew and revitalize it. The inherited church finds renewal and revitalization through the base communities in their growth, their adaptation, and their fresh perspectives. Pedro Demo, a sociologist researching the problems of community, spoke to this idea when he wrote, "A large organization can be renewed by a community, but it cannot be transformed into a community."¹⁴ Demo goes on to explain further:

Therefore, all hope vanishes of organizing an entire church along lines of a communitarian network. This would be tantamount to institutionalizing the de-institutionalizing aspect of community. This is not to say that [a community's] formation cannot be organized by well-prepared teams. But its internal experience

¹³ Michael Adam Beck, *Painting With Ashes: When Your Weakness Becomes Your Superpower* (Plano, TX: Invite Press, 2022), 242.

¹⁴ Pedro Demo, in *Comunidades: Igreja na Base, Estudos da CNBB no. 3* (São Paulo, Brazil: Paulinas, 1975), 93.

seems to renew its vitality daily, drinking at its own wells. Indeed, here is its source of strength for protest, here is where it draws its utopian attraction.”¹⁵

In other words, what Demo is saying is that inherited church cannot be made into the kind of community that a “base community” naturally is. Once institutionalized, it cannot be made into the flexible network that one finds in a more communitarian group. Therefore, what Demo suggests and stands as the central argument of Boff’s writing on ecclesiology, is the concept of a church ecosystem. The institutional church finds revitalization from the base communities while the communities themselves find legitimacy in their connection to the institutional church. In the best case that leads to a cross-pollination of ideas, keeping the base communities grounded in those things we find most important about our ecclesiology while giving it room to flex and experiment with what it means to be church. The institutional church, in turn, gets new ideas. Voices from outside of its former sphere of influence.

The method chosen by the early fathers and mothers of the Church were not chosen because they were empirically correct, but because they were methods that were familiar to the people that these early churches were trying to reach. The focus was not on creating a system that would be followed without variation for centuries, but to do what was necessary to teach the liberating message of Christ to the people in front of them today. In many ways, these base communities work in the same adaptive ways as the original Church.

It is this liberating message and the inclusion of these outside voices that constitutes another key aspect of ecclesiology for Boff. “The basic communities area

¹⁵ Demo, *Comunidades*, 93.

response to the question: How may the community experience of the apostolic faith be embodied and structured in the conditions of a people who, in Brazil as throughout Latin America, are both religious and oppressed?"¹⁶ For Boff the marginalized were not of secondary importance. The existing church did a good job of serving those with economic privilege. The need, as Boff saw it, lay most commonly from the disadvantaged communities. People who were religious but without the means to travel to more affluent areas where the few clergy were stationed.

More importantly than simply doing ministry among the marginalized, however, Boff calls for a ministry that is specifically mindful of the needs of the marginalized and the ability of the Church to make a difference in those circumstances. This sentiment is echoed in the words of Saint Oscar Romero:

Unfortunately, brothers and sisters, we are the product
Of a spiritualized, individualistic education.
We are taught:
 Try to save your soul and don't worry about the rest.
We told the suffering:
 Be patient, heaven will follow, hand on.
No, that's not right, that's not salvation!
That's not the salvation Christ brought.
The salvation Christ brings
 Is a salvation from every bondage
 That oppresses human beings.¹⁷

Like many liberation theologians, Boff and Romero both view ministry in and among the marginalized as one of the hallmarks of a Church that is behaving the way it ought to. Gustavo Gutierrez, one of the fathers of liberation theology, has the following

¹⁶ Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 4.

¹⁷ Óscar A Romero and James R. Brockman, *The Violence of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 177.

they say regarding the intersection of liberation and our living out of the gospel as

Christians:

The annunciation of the Gospel thus has a conscientizing function, or in other words, a politicizing function. But this is made real and meaningful only by living and announcing the Gospel from within a commitment to liberation, only in concrete, effective solidarity with people and exploited social classes. Only by participating in their struggles can we understand the implications of the gospel message and make it have an impact on history. The preaching of the Word will be empty and ahistorical if it tries to avoid this dimension.¹⁸

The fact of the matter is that the Church must continue to evolve to meet the world in which it finds itself, or it will surely end up a dead relic like so many of the ancient religions. This adaptability is coded directly into the DNA of what it means to be a Christian:

The primitive church, in its essential apostolic character, created functions in response to needs or adapted a style already prevailing, as the synagogal concept was adapted in the college of presbyters. Whether or not to maintain past structures was unimportant. To render the risen One and his Spirit present to the world, to make his liberating message of grace, pardon, and unrestricted love heard, to facilitate human beings' response to these calls—these were the primary concerns.¹⁹

The importance of these base communities, and ecclesiology more broadly, in these marginalized populations cannot be overstated. These are a form of church that can stand in the gap, not only ministering to the marginalized populations, but giving voice to people who have historically had none. Additionally, these communities create an opportunity for organized civic action, both allowing the marginalized population to help themselves, but also allowing them to advocate on their own behalf. With organization

¹⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez, Caridad Inda, and John Eagleson, *A Theology of Liberation History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), chap. 12, Kindle.

¹⁹ Boff, *Ecclesiology*, chap. 5.

and numbers comes opportunity. In Boff's own words, "On two points opinion was unanimous: (1) the main root of this oppression is the elitist, exclusive, capitalist system; and (2) people resist and are liberated to the extent that they unite and create a network of popular movements."²⁰

Importantly for the influence of these communities, however, is the connection between these base communities and the larger inherited church. As Boff, Romero, and Gutierrez all stated in their own ways, the story of the gospel requires us to align ourselves with the marginalized, to have not only empathy for their plight but the kind of genuine concern that leads to action. The base communities, in Boff's eyes, are not simply a balm to ease the pain of being marginalized, but a mechanism for affecting change both inside and outside of those communities.

If these communities existed in a vacuum, apart from the inherited church, it would be easy for the institution of the church to ignore both these marginalized communities and the plight of the people inhabiting them. But with these communities being connected with the larger church, in what the fresh expressions movement calls a blended ecology, these communities are a limb of the larger body. In essence this means that the plight of the people in the marginalized communities is not "their" problem, it is "our" problem from the perspective of the larger church.

Faced with a lack of clergy available to serve them, with official Brazilian statistics at the time having "1.8 priests for every 10,000 of the faithful, and the proportion is dwindling,"²¹ these underserved communities had to get creative in order to

²⁰ Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 4.

²¹ Laurentin René, *Nouveaux ministères Et Fin Du clergé Devant Le Iiie Synode* (Paris, France: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), 90-93.

meet the needs of the growing Christian populations in the region. Still, most of these communities are without credentialled and ordained clergy.²² In the same way as the original Church fathers and mothers, the leaders of these communities begin to adapt, leading to complicated ecclesiological questions:

As the basic communities grow, they themselves provide more and more of the services that meet their needs. The people's awareness that they all are church, and therefore responsible, lends a new urgency to the question: Now that our coordinators perform all the pastoral tasks that an ordained minister performs, why can they not consecrate and absolve?²³

As new church communities continue to evolve, finding new areas where the established system does not meet the needs of the new community, they begin to push at the boundaries. The boundaries that define the established, inherited church do not always work for these new communities. It affords the opportunity, however, for the Church to determine which boundaries are necessary and which are simply tradition. For example, meeting inside of the church building is traditional, meeting in other locations around the community has increasingly become a way in which these communities have reached new people.²⁴ This meets an emergent need of reaching people who might not choose to enter the church building.

In a similar way, Boff shows the Brazilian communities coming up against the boundary of clergy-led services. The emergent need in their case is that there are communities of believers unserved by clergy due to a shortage. The solution, therefore, has been a steady pushing against the boundary of what a lay-led service can look like

²² Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 6.

²³ Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 6.

²⁴ Michael Moynagh, *Changing World, Changing Church: New forms of church, Out-of-the-pew thinking, Initiatives that work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 2001), 124.

and contain. "This shift of the ecclesial axis contains, in seed, a new principle for "birthing the church," for "starting the church again."²⁵ It is a transposition that bids fair to form the principle of a genuine "ecclesiogenesis."²⁶ At its core, this process of ecclesiogenesis involves finding the emergent needs of the community and seeking to meet them with a fresh form of church community.

In a smaller and oftentimes slower form, this is the process seen at work within the inherited church as well, as Bishop Spong describes, "The Roman Catholic mass has abandoned its classical Latin. The Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* is periodically revised. The books of worship of every other liturgical church are always undergoing modification."²⁷ Change, but incremental in nature, is happening within the inherited church. The fact is that there is much within the inherited church that is resistant to change. "As Yves Congar has written: "Think of the church as a huge organization, controlled by a hierarchy, with subordinates whose only task it is to keep the rules and follow the practices. Would this be a caricature? Scarcely!"²⁸

It is here that ecclesiogenesis comes in. The change on the part of the institutional church is slow and limited, as befits an organization steeped in tradition, but it is insufficient change to meet the needs in the community. Another option is needed. Not a replacement, but a supplement. An option for those who are not being served well by the

²⁵ Yves M. -J. Congar, "Os Grupos Informais na Igreja," in *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base: Utopia ou Realidade?* ed. Alfonso Gregory (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1973), 129-30.

²⁶ Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 1.

²⁷ John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith is Dying & How A New Faith is Being Born* (New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 202.

²⁸ Yves M. -J. Congar, "Os Grupos Informais na Igreja," in Alfonso Gregory, ed., *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base: Utopia ou Realidade?* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1973), 144-45.

inherited church, whether because of systemic limitations in the case of Brazil, or because of different needs as seen in much of the Fresh Expressions movement.

Ecclesiogenesis and Fresh Expressions

This concept of ecclesiogenesis is core to any discussion of fresh expressions. “A fresh expression is a form of church for our changing culture, established primarily for the benefit of those who are not yet part of any church.”²⁹ Ecclesiogenesis can thereby be seen as the theological undergirding of the Fresh Expressions movement. The major difference between Boff’s Brazilian example and the typical fresh expression is that, in the Brazilian situation, the individuals in the base communities were those who wanted to go to a church but there were none available. For most fresh expressions, as emphasized by the definition above, the focus is on those who are not part of the inherited church. There are individuals who have had opportunities to go to an inherited church and, for whatever reasons, have not felt it to be of interest to them. Fresh expressions are therefore designed to appeal to those who believe in God but feel no attraction toward the inherited church.

Much like Boff’s examples from Brazil, the majority of fresh expressions are run by the laity. This is not usually because of a complete lack of ordained clergy, like in the Brazilian situation, but instead because of the intended spread of fresh expressions combined with the natural limits of the clergy person’s time. The hope of a fresh expressions is that, in the process of discipleship, new leaders are grown who begin their

²⁹ Michael Adam Beck and Tyler Kleeberger, *Fresh Expressions of the Rural Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2022), xx.

own fresh expressions. This leads to a natural form of growth that, if clergy-led, would soon become too much for one person's schedule. Therefore, the day of day activities of a fresh expression are commonly run by a lay person while, depending on the denomination, the taking of sacraments may occasionally require the presence of the clergyperson.

If the theology of ecclesiogenesis is important to all fresh expressions, it is even more important to this doctoral project, for several reasons. Firstly, it being central to Boff's view of base communities that they are perfect for marginalized populations connects with the central issue for the Queer Church fresh expression. The reason for a fresh expression specifically focused on the LGBTQIA+ community is because of the marginalized nature of the LGBTQIA+ community. It is because the many LGBTQIA+ individuals have been hurt by a church or by Christians that a special ministry is called for. It is through this specific community that God's love and gospel can be shared in a place that feels safe for them.

Outside of the LGBTQIA+ experience of church, such a community creates an opportunity to speak about the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in society today. While the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals have expanded greatly since the days of the Stonewall riots, there are still ways in which the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals are still limited in ways that are not experienced by cisgendered and heterosexual peers. In conservative states, transgendered individuals experience systemic limitations that serve to prevent or complicate them taking steps to affirm their gender identity. Other places, LGBTQIA+ individuals are forced to hide their identity when working in public settings like schools and hospitals for fear of being accused of "grooming" vulnerable

people toward becoming LGBTQIA+. Meanwhile half of US states have attempted to ban new books in the last 9 months (as of April, 2022)³⁰ with 40% of books being target for reasons related to LGBTQIA+ representation³¹. For LGBTQIA+ individuals, this leads to more heterosexual and cisgender normalization, and less positive representation of LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Queer Church, as with any base community operating from within a marginalized population, not only gives a source for positive and affirming representation but also creates a structure wherein the voices of the marginalized population are amplified. This allows them to both speak out against attempts at further marginalization as well as to spread positive representation about their community. By both seeking to tend to their souls as well as affect their liberation from the structures that create inequity, these base communities or fresh expressions are living out the liberating message of the gospel.

In the same vein, the idea that a base community is usually led by the laity connects with one of the felt needs of the Queer Church fresh expression, namely the need for LGBTQIA+ individuals to lead the services. Because churches being run by LGBTQIA+ clergy are in the minority, this requires that the individual facilitating these Queer Church fresh expressions would be laity. The importance of the facilitator cannot be overstated. Because of the heteronormative culture, much of the life of an LGBTQIA+ individual is prescribed for them by cisgendered straight people. If LGBTQIA+ individuals are going to be given an opportunity to heal from their previous bad

³⁰ Elliot Ramos, "Map: Book Bans on The Rise," NBCNews.com, last modified April 26, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/data-graphics/map-book-bans-rise-rcna25898>.

³¹ Jonathan Friedman and Nadine Farid Johnson, "Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools," PEN America, last modified October 11, 2022, <https://pen.org/report/banned-usa-growing-movement-to-censor-books-in-schools/>.

experiences with churches and Christians, it is going to require an atmosphere where the people in charge have similar lived experiences.

Finally, the lay leadership seen in the Brazilian base communities and the subsequent conferences regarding the new Christian groups is key to justice within the Church in much the same way as it was in Brazil. Just as the economically disadvantaged in Brazil had long been denied a voice within the Church, the vast majority of ruling voices in the Church today are cisgendered and heterosexual. Many denominations outright deny ordination or lay leadership to self-avowed LGBTQIA+ individuals. While there are denominations who have opened their polity and leadership structure to individuals regardless of sexuality and gender identity, Queer Church as a fresh expression allows for a relatively rare opportunity for a marginalized people group to find leadership opportunity within the Church. With leadership opportunity comes a voice, something historically denied to LGBTQIA+ individuals by the Church.

Essentially, Boff's theology of ecclesiology creates a framework for the creation of a ministry that is not only LGBTQIA+ focused and led, but also one that seeks to improve the situation of the LGBTQIA+ population. In the next chapter we will look at how an understanding of trauma can empower our ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

When discussing Fresh Expressions as a trauma-sensitive form of ministry for LGBTQIA+ individuals, there is no more closely related or necessary field to include than that of trauma psychology and specifically the subset of the field dedicated to helping those who suffer the after-effects of trauma. This chapter will include works from some of the leading scholars on PTSD and Religious Trauma to: define both Religious Trauma and PTSD, show how trauma affects the individual, and proven methods of treating trauma. In the process this chapter will draw connections to the Biblical, Historical, Contextual, and Theological chapters to show how this study of trauma and the traumatized individual connects with the whole of the project.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, an accurate definition of PTSD would be:

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events or set of circumstances. An individual may experience this as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and may affect mental, physical, social, and/or spiritual well-being. Examples include natural disasters, serious accidents, terrorist acts, war/combat, rape/sexual assault, historical trauma, intimate partner violence and bullying.¹

¹ Monica Taylor-Desir, “What Is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?,” Psychiatry.org, last modified November 2022, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>.

Johnson and Van Vonderen in their book *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse*, define spiritual abuse as “The mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support or greater spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining, or decreasing that person’s spiritual empowerment.”² Ken Blue, in *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, shifts the perspective from the victim to the abuser by defining spiritual abuse as “when a leader with spiritual authority uses that authority to coerce, control, or exploit a follower, this causing spiritual wounds.”³ There is no singular definition of spiritual abuse, with Blue’s definition acting as a corrective to Johnson and Van Vonderen’s but also risking taking the emphasis away from the individual suffering from the abuse⁴. For this chapter’s purposes, given the amount of overlap in the definitions, both definitions will be used together. Johnson and Van Vonderen accurately depict the results, while Blue describes the causes, allowing us to see the whole picture of spiritual abuse.

Marlene Winell, the first to use the term “religious trauma syndrome”, connected it almost exclusively with leaving a religious group to heal.⁵ While her definition is limited, her term “religious trauma” is a useful connection for us between spiritual abuse and PTSD. Maria P.P. Root, a feminist psychoanalyst, argues for a category known as insidious trauma. This kind of trauma, often resulting from racism, sexism, and homophobia, shapes the worldview of the victims. The core result is that the world

² David Johnson and Jeffrey VanVonderen, *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse - Recognizing & Escaping Spiritual Manipulation and False Spiritual Authority within the Church* (Winnipeg, Canada: Media Production Services Unit, Manitoba Education, 2010), 20.

³ Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse - How to Break Free from Bad Church Experiences* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 12-14.

⁴ Brooke N. Petersen, *Religious Trauma: Queer Stories in Estrangement and Return* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 4.

⁵ Petersen, *Religious Trauma*, 4.

becomes a place that cannot be trusted, and one's safety—physical, social, or psychological—cannot be guaranteed.⁶ It is this category, when combined with the experience of spiritual abuse, that connects most closely to the experiences Winell saw in her study of individuals leaving toxic religious experiences.

The fact is, LGBTQIA+ individuals experience religious trauma much more commonly than even some researchers expected. Brooke Petersen, in their study of religious trauma among the LGBTQIA+ population and those who later returned to an affirming⁷ church community, was surprised at the number of individuals expressing that they had experienced religious trauma. When recalling her interaction with this community's pastor, Petersen writes:

I was ready with data, believing that if I could convince this pastor that religious trauma was present in their church community, they might help me to find people willing to share their stories.

My notes were unnecessary. Once I spoke the words “religious trauma” the conversation ground to a halt. “Tell me how many people you need,” he told me, “Because I have more people who would raise their hand and say this is me than you could interview in a lifetime.”⁸

Petersen goes on to explain the effects of this trauma on LGBTQIA+ individuals, establishing why it is so important for there to be affirming ministries specifically aimed at healing the trauma of religiously traumatized LGBTQIA+ individuals:

⁶ Maria P. P. Root, “Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality,” in *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*, ed. L. S. Brown and M. Ballou (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 1992), 241.

⁷ A church that does not express any doctrinal statements about LGBTQIA+ individuals or relationships being sinful, and advertise their welcome of LGBTQIA+ individuals into the church community.

⁸ Petersen, *Religious Trauma*, ix.

LGBTQIA+ people are at higher risk for suicide attempts, substance abuse, depression and other mental health problems.⁹ Yet, it is not just the sexual orientation of LGBTQIA+ people, but the levels of support for their sexuality that impact the health risks they experience. A 2012 study suggested that in supportive environments LGBTQIA+ people often experience high self-esteem and lower levels of depression and anger, while in communities of lower support, coming out as LGBTQIA+ does not correlate with lower levels of anger and depression.¹⁰¹¹

In my context of Revolution Church, a made-for-online church that is aimed at LGBTQIA+ individuals and anyone else who has been hurt by the church, this kind of religious trauma is often the reason congregants chose to come to us. Nearly every individual who has chosen to call Revolution Church home has experienced a church disowning, disaffiliating, or attacking them because of their sexuality, gender identity, or their views on LGBTQIA+ affirmation within the church. Many experienced a long period struggling with their faith in the aftermath, wrestling with whether their former faith community was right.

It is a surprise that many of these individuals chose to return to church at all, given that a common symptom of PTSD is “Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred,” with a specific example being given of “Avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations) that arouse distressing

⁹ C. Ryan, D. Heubner, R. M. Diaz, and J. Sanchez, “Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Adult.” *Pediatrics* 123 (2009): 346-352.

¹⁰ N Legate, R. M. Ryan, and N. Weinstein, “Is Coming Out Always a ‘Good Thing’? Exploring the Relations of Autonomy Support, Outness, and Wellness for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals,” *Social Psychology and Personality Science* 3 (2012): 145-152.

¹¹ Petersen, *Religious Trauma*, 6.

memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).”¹²

It is hard to imagine that entering into a church environment, albeit one that is online and therefore lacks the visual trappings of traditional church, would fail to provide stimuli reminding the individuals of their trauma. Still, the individuals decided that their faith is important enough to face potential reminders of their trauma.

Dr. Beck speaks to this mission of the Church in his book *Painting with Ashes*, “The church should be a place where wounded people can come and be made well again, not with flashy miracles, but by finding a safe place where they can unbandage and bare their wounds in a community of love and forgiveness.”¹³

In the theological chapter, Leonardo Boff’s concept of ecclesigenesis was discussed at length. This form of creating church, empowering the marginalized laity to do for themselves what the institutional church will not do for them, is the heart of what the Queer Church fresh expression is all about, and this history of religious trauma among LGBTQIA+ people is why. The difference, in our case, is that laity are not the only ones being marginalized by the institutional church’s homophobia and transphobia. Among those harmed are many faithful clergy and former-clergy who, by virtue of their sexuality or gender identity alone, were stripped of their positions and sometimes their credentials.

This base community, as Boff would call it, exists either outside of or independent of the institutional church for the safety of both the laity and the clergy

¹² American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2017), 271.

¹³ Michael Adam Beck, *Painting With Ashes: When Your Weakness Becomes Your Superpower* (Plano, TX: Invite Press, 2022), 146.

involved. Individuals for whom worship and life within the community of the church was only permitted if they denied and hid a core aspect of who they are as a person. Instead, Queer Church seeks to bring them together to worship, heal from their traumas, and reconnect with a God that never stopped loving them even when the church did.

As discussed before, LGBTQIA+ individuals who are not in affirming relationships with friends and family have a higher risk of suicidal behavior, but that is not the end of the effects of trauma on the individual. Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score – Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, establishes ways in which our thinking as well as our physical body are affected by trauma for years after the original incident. Van Der Kolk explains, “trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions. It changes not only how we think and what we think about, but our very capacity to think.”¹⁴ He also states, “We also learned that trauma effects the imagination.”¹⁵

In Van Der Kolk’s study with veterans, he found that routinely those who had experienced profound trauma would present with a lack of mental flexibility and a lack of imagination. Often this would be visible through a Rorschach test, also known as an ink blot test. While a normal person would often view the ink blots and come up with something it looked like, a butterfly or a car for example, traumatized individuals often had one of two responses. They would either view the ink blot and be returned to the moment of trauma, or they would respond that they saw nothing but ink on paper.¹⁶

¹⁴ Bessel A Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2015), 21.

¹⁵ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 17.

¹⁶ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 15-17 paraphrased.

This lack of imagination has a negative result on the ability of an individual to really connect with and embody a faith. Faith requires of us an ability to imagine a future where everything is better, when God's will has been accomplished in the world, and then embody those steps that would help bring that realization to life. Without the imagination necessary to see that better world that faith promises us, it is difficult for someone to embrace a faith on any level more complex than the comforting repetition of a ritual. Hope requires the ability to imagine a future in which things are better than they are today. Without that imagination, one is stuck in the current's challenge without respite.

PTSD affects more than just the imagination sections of the brain, however. Dr. Van Der Kolk explains later in his book how, during a traumatic episode, how the left hemisphere of the brain is largely deactivated:

Deactivation of the left hemisphere has a direct impact on the capacity to organize experience into logical sequences and to translate our shifting feelings and perceptions into words. (Broca's area, which blacks out during flashbacks, is on the left side.) Without sequencing, we can't identify cause and effect, grasp the long-term effects of our actions, or create coherent plans for the future. People who are very upset sometimes say they are "losing their minds." In technical terms they are experiencing the loss of executive functioning.

When something reminds traumatized people of the past, their right brain reacts as if the traumatic event were happening in the present. But because their left brain is not working very well, they may not be aware that they are reexperiencing and reenacting the past—they are just furious, terrified, enraged, ashamed, or frozen.¹⁷

With this explanation of how a traumatic event affects the ability to think clearly about what one is feeling, it is easy to understand why anyone who has experienced

¹⁷ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 45.

religious trauma would hesitate to return to any place of worship that reminded them of what had happened. This is perhaps why, in the events discussed in the historical chapter, the African American Christians chose to form their own church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church rather than continuing to fight for their own place within the Methodist Episcopal Church. For those who had suffered the brunt of the abuse from the white congregants and clergy, the church would likely have no longer felt like a safe place to worship. Perhaps, even, in ways they could not articulate because of what Van Der Kolk explained above. Therefore, instead of continuing to fight in an unsafe place, a new church was born that felt safe to those who had been harmed by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Safety is a core need for us as people, and traumatic events not only rob us of that feeling of safety in the moment, but the effect remains. Van Der Kolk explains how the assault on our sense of safety from PTSD goes beyond the brain:

The central function of the amygdala, which I call the brain's smoke detector, is to identify whether incoming input is relevant for our survival...¹⁸ If the amygdala senses a threat—a potential collision with an oncoming vehicle, a person on the street who looks threatening—it sends an instant message down the hypothalamus and the brain stem, recruiting the stress-hormone system and the autonomic nervous system (ANS) to orchestrate a whole-body response. Because the amygdala processes the information it receives from the thalamus faster than the frontal lobes do, it decides whether incoming information is a threat to our survival even before we are consciously aware of the danger.¹⁹

That is how the system works when everything is going according to plan. “As long as you’re not too upset, your frontal lobes can restore your balance by helping you

¹⁸ Joseph LeDoux, “Rethinking the Emotional Brain,” *Neuron* 73, no. 5 (2012): 653-76, doi:10.1016/j.neuron.2012.02.018.

¹⁹ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 60-61.

to realize that you are responding to a false alarm and abort the stress response.”²⁰ The section of the frontal lobe responsible for maintaining this balance is known as the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC).²¹ When the individual has PTSD, however, that is not always the way in which the brain behaves. “In PTSD the critical balance between the amygdala (smoke detector) and the MPFC (watchtower) shifts radically, which makes it much harder to control emotions and impulses.”²² The stress involved in fighting these traumatic flashbacks and triggers can result in serious physical issues like fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, and other autoimmune issues.²³

Despite all of the neurological and physical effects of the trauma:

Flashbacks and reliving are in some ways worse than the trauma itself. A traumatic event has a beginning and an end—at some point it is over. But for people with PTSD a flashback can occur at any time, whether they are awake or asleep. There is no way of knowing when it’s going to occur again or how long it’ll last. People who suffer from flashbacks often organize their lives around trying to protect against them.²⁴

It is here, in the last sentence of Van Der Kolk’s above quote, that we see the impetus for both the current LGBTQIA+ avoidance of the church and the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church so many years ago. Those who have experienced trauma tend to avoid the kinds of stimulus that can cause flashbacks or episodes of reliving the trauma. When those traumatic experiences happened either inside

²⁰ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 62.

²¹ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 62.

²² Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 62-63.

²³ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 53.

²⁴ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 66-67.

of a church or from someone connected to the church, it can be hard to separate the trappings of the church from the trauma. Some of those same elements that bring comfort and familiarity to the untraumatized, candles, wooden pews, crosses, altar cloths, can be the kinds of stimuli that can make an unfamiliar sanctuary feel like the place where the trauma happened.

For many, the solution to this was to run away from the church altogether. For others this means finding a church that does not remotely resemble the church in which they grew up, hoping not to be triggered by other kinds of stimuli. In Brooke Petersen's research and religiously traumatized LGBTQIA+ individuals, all 8 of the participants had grown up in a conservative church and had found their way to a progressive church.²⁵ Many others struggled even to do that.

For the original members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, it was not the trappings of church that made them feel unsafe, but the ways in which they had been relegated into a second-class position in the church. So the church they created for themselves had much of the same trappings and liturgy as the Methodist Episcopal Church, but without the discrimination, and with a distinctly African American flair.

It is because of this understanding of the prevalence of flashbacks and the necessity of a perception of safety that the Queer Church fresh expression is necessarily queer-led and queer-focused, and that it happens outside of the structure of a church. This avoids the common visual triggers of a church sanctuary, as well as the interpersonal triggers of a religiously abused LGBTQIA+ individual feeling as though they will need to explain themselves to a cisgendered and/or heterosexual person.

²⁵ Brooke N. Petersen, *Religious Trauma*, x.

Ultimately, it is not enough to simply understand the effects of trauma on the individual. You need to work to mitigate the symptoms and heal whatever you can. Any trauma-sensitive ministry, as Queer Church aims to be, must tackle not only the negative effects of trauma but also question how they can be a place of healing and comfort. Judith Herman in her work *Trauma and Recovery*, delineates three stages of recovery from trauma—establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with the ordinary.²⁶

Establishing Safety

Janina Fisher adapts Judy Herman's four stages for her workbook *Transforming the Living Legacy of Trauma* and lays out the three tasks required to establish safety and stability:

- Establishment of bodily safety (e.g., abstinence from self-injury, sobriety)
- Establishment of a safe environment (e.g., a secure living situation, non-abusive relationships, a job and/or regular income, adequate supports)
- Establishment of emotional stability (e.g., ability to calm the body, regulate impulses, self-soothe, and manage post-traumatic symptoms triggered by mundane events)²⁷

This list tells the ministry that is trying to be trauma-sensitive a few things.

Firstly, there is some work that must be done on the individual's own part before they can

²⁶ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (London, UK: Pandora, 2015), 157.

²⁷ Janina Fisher, *Transforming the Living Legacy of Trauma: A Workbook for Survivors and Therapists* (Eau Claire, WI: PESI Publishing & Media, 2021), 103.

be safe to return to a site that could trigger their PTSD. Regardless of the kind of trauma experienced, lack of safety in everyday life will decrease the individual's ability to handle additional perceptions of lacking safety. Additionally, it shows that if we want to support individuals with PTSD, our support needs to go beyond the psychological. We may need to provide or be able to refer to trusted and safe sites for, addiction help, homelessness services, battered person shelters, unemployment services, welfare supports, and even counseling. While any one of these could be a ministry provided by or supported by a church, no church would reasonably provide all of these services. Therefore, having a system to refer individuals to safe and effective resources would be key.

Herman points to the experience of naming the trauma, not necessarily going into all of the details and thereby risking a flashback, but the naming of the trauma as central to the process of creating the kinds of relationships that can lead to healing.²⁸ For Petersen, who was studying the return of religiously traumatized LGBTQIA+ individuals to the life of the church, "Establishing safety also extends to the creation of a safe environment for the reestablishment of a relationship with God and with the church."²⁹

This naming is one step toward what Van Der Kolk calls the process of "re-establishing ownership of one's mind and body."³⁰ Dr. Fisher outlines what this looks like in her workbook:

²⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 158.

²⁹ Petersen, *Religious Trauma*, 119.

³⁰ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 203.

- Expanding the window of tolerance until both the implicit memories and the day-to-day stresses of a life after trauma can be experienced as within our capacity
- Recognizing as implicit memory the feeling and bodily states that can still be triggered even after successful treatment, whether or not we have the images or narrative of an event.
- Learning to recognize triggering stimuli and to accurately label triggered states as responses to the past.
- Identifying distressing feelings or symptoms as survival strategies rather than as problems or defects to be eliminated.³¹

While none of those steps explicitly state the naming of the trauma, it is a core part of all of them. Traumatized individuals cannot recognize triggers or triggered states within themselves as responses to the past without first being willing to name and accept the trauma as both present and a part of their lives. Denial prevents the necessary steps to creating internal stability.

For ministries seeking to be trauma-sensitive, this means a lot of listening. If the individual feels supported enough, they may express what stimuli are triggering them. In that case, the ministry has a choice whether some form of change can be made to eliminate that particular stimulus without harming the rest of the congregation. This could look like avoiding a particular hymn, prayer, or phrase, or perhaps giving a

³¹ Fisher, *Transforming the Living Legacy*, 96.

warning before a certain liturgical element so the individual can remove themselves from the room.

Coming to Terms with Traumatic Memories

This is the section of the PTSD recovery process that needs to be left to the mental health professionals. “At this stage, the survivor works to overcome the fear of the traumatic events and body/emotional memories so they can be integrated, allowing appreciation for the person he or she has become as a result of the trauma.”³² Dr. Van Der Kolk gives an insight into the limitations of trauma therapy, explaining in his own way how trauma cannot be healed, but it can be dealt with such that the effects of the trauma on the individual’s everyday life are minimized:

Nobody can ‘treat’ a war, or abuse, rape, molestation, or any other horrendous event, for that matter; what has happened cannot be undone. But what *can* be dealt with³³ are the imprints of trauma on the body, mind, and soul... Trauma robs you of that feeling that you are in charge of yourself, of what I call self-leadership in chapters to come. The challenge of recovery is to reestablish ownership of your body and your mind—of yourself.³⁴

In order to do this, several specialized therapies are utilized such as: Internal Family Systems therapy, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, Somatic Experiencing, and EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing).³⁵ While there is much in the

³² Fisher, *Transforming the Living Legacy*, 104.

³³ Emphasis his.

³⁴ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 203.

³⁵ Fisher, *Transforming the Living Legacy*, 104.

process of helping a trauma victim process their experiences and heal that a ministry can help with, there are times when we can do nothing but trust the experts. A trauma-sensitive ministry needs to have resources on hand for referral, including mental health.

Integration and Moving On

In this final stage of the recovery process, it is important that the traumatic memories are integrated such that they become memories as opposed to traumatic moments.³⁶ “When people remember an ordinary event, they do not also relive the physical sensations, emotions, images, smells, or sounds associated with that event. In contrast, when people fully recall their traumas, they ‘have’ the experience.”³⁷ This is the core difference between trauma and memory, and the process of integration begun by the previous step is how these traumas go from debilitating to stories we tell.

Integrating the memories, however, is not the end of the process. “People cannot put traumatic events behind them until they are able to acknowledge what has happened and start to recognize the invisible demons they are struggling with.”³⁸ What this is getting at is the way trauma changes an individual’s worldview. Someone who is robbed might struggle to walk down the street and feel safe, even in their own neighborhood. Someone who was sexually abused might struggle with intimacy in their own relationships.

³⁶ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 219.

³⁷ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 219.

³⁸ Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 219.

This is the process of moving on, creating a new life and experiencing the challenges of everyday life without feeling badly about the ways in which trauma continues to be a part of their story and the way they walk in the world. Someone who survives a near-fatal car accident may never be quite as comfortable in a car, but they can remind themselves that not every drive—or even every accident—is that dangerous. Dr. Fisher explains it this way:

The survivor can now begin to work on decreasing shame and self-alienation, developing a greater capacity for healthy attachment, and taking up personal and professional goals that reflect post-traumatic meaning-making. Overcoming fears of a normal life, healthy challenge and change, and intimacy become the focus of the work.³⁹

It is during this process of the recovery process that the trauma-sensitive community can be pivotal in helping the individual to succeed. It is common for individuals going through recovery from trauma to judge themselves on their amount of progress, the ways in which they still struggle, or the triggers they still experience.⁴⁰ “Most of us will not recognize that we are there until well after our own personal legacy of trauma has been resolved and we have forgiven ourselves.”⁴¹ It is here that a Christ-centered community, grounded in the lessons of grace and forgiveness, can be a constant, loving reminder to the individual that grace has been extended to them.

All of these elements, the ways in which we can support and help to heal those with PTSD from religious trauma, are integral to both our Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21) discussed in the biblical chapter. As stated above when discussing

³⁹ Fisher, *Transforming the Living Legacy*, 104.

⁴⁰ Fisher, *Transforming the Living Legacy*, 104-105.

⁴¹ Fisher, *Transforming the Living Legacy*, 105.

Leonardo Boff's theology of ecclesigenesis, God never stopped loving the LGBTQIA+ Christians whom this fresh expression seeks to serve, even when the church did.

Therefore, this fresh expression and the ways in which we seek to heal the traumas that have been done by other churches, is a "ministry of reconciliation." Not between God and the individual, because God's mercy surely understands the pain of trauma, but between the traumatized individual and the Church universal.

The unfortunate truth is that many LGBTQIA+ individuals who experience religious trauma at the hands of the church ascribe that abuse not only to the specific church or denomination that hurt them, but to all Christians. Showing that there is a church that not only loves them for who they are, but will also hold space for them even with the trauma they bring with them, can be a healing experience. Just as Paul's "ministry of reconciliation" was not to judge, ours is to see the unfair judgements of other Christian churches with all the damage that they have done, and try to heal that damage.

This interdisciplinary work guided all other work in this project once it was found. Initially, this project was based on creating ministry for LGBTQIA+ individuals without the trauma-sensitivity element. While that project would have had an impact, the resulting ministry would not have been unique. Without the research element, there are many LGBTQIA+ ministries that have formed both inside and outside of churches, many as a result of institutional homophobia. However, understanding the capacity of these ministries to be trauma-sensitive has opened the door to a unique way of both viewing and programming these ministries. Knowing that they have the capacity to be trauma-sensitive, ministry leaders can be intentional with their planning in order to maximize the benefits to participants.

For the project's context, this element was formative in nature. The context for this project changed during the course of project planning, resulting in the launching of a new online church, Revolution Church. Much of what was learned in the process of creating this doctoral project was utilized in the planning, mission, and vision for Revolution Church. Not the least of which this understanding of trauma psychology and treatment. Revolution Church is a ministry that draws to itself LGBTQIA+ individuals from anywhere in the country, and theoretically anywhere in the world, who have been harmed by a church in the past. Therefore, building the church from the beginning with an understanding of religious trauma and its treatment has been key.

Likewise, this subject has illuminated the theological element. Ecclesiogenesis, rooted in Liberation Theology, speaks about various forms of discrimination: gender, racial, and economic. The understanding of how religious trauma can happen related to the homophobia and transphobia present in many Christian traditions helped to better inform how that theology can be applied to a new context in a new century. Instead of individuals unable to have a church because of a lack of money and available clergy, we are looking at individuals unable to participate in existing churches due to their sexuality or gender identities. In these cases we see the same ecclesiogenesis happen.

Historically it has been interesting to put into conversation the idea of trauma and the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Because of different views on trauma over the centuries, there is no clear answer to the kinds of suffering that may have been caused by the rampant racism within the Methodist Episcopal Church. Even without these specifics, however, the understanding of trauma psychology and treatment shows how beneficial the formation of an African American denomination would have been for

those who suffered through such racially-motivated religious abuse. This research into the AME, however, then led back to thinking about the current moment of the church. This, unfortunately, led to more questions than answers regarding how the church will handle rampant and institutional supported homo/trans-phobia on one hand and a growing public support for affirmation on the other.

Finally, the understanding of this discipline has led to a refining in the understanding of the project's key Biblical text, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. The "ministry of reconciliation" element had been present since the beginning, knowing that the focus was not on reconciling the individual to God but to the community of the church. That had not been clear, however, were elements of the cause and the mechanism. The cause was always known to involve homophobic and/or transphobic words and actions on the part of churches and Christians. What was missing, however, was an understanding of the damage caused by religious trauma. Knowing that, the mechanism for this "ministry of reconciliation" became more clear. In order to help individuals who left the Church because of religious trauma, much of what would be required would mirror recovery from any other form of trauma.

This discipline informed elements of everything else in this project, making the whole of the project better for its inclusion. The actions of churches and Christians can have an impact outside of the realms of theology and ecclesiology, this is the heart of our missional work, but too often it is forgotten that the impact can go both ways. Unhealthy and harmful behavior too can have an impact beyond the theological and ecclesiological. Therefore, when one is attempting to minister to those who have left the Church, there is

benefit to asking what lasting impacts might exist from past experiences and how we can help those wounds to heal.

At its core, this is the heart of this doctoral project. LGBTQIA+ individuals have long been treated poorly by churches, and in response have left the Church in droves. These same LGBTQIA+ individuals, however, are beloved of God, and we are called to reconcile them to the Church. Because of the specific damages done, understanding and implementation of the study of trauma and its treatment will be key to the success of this “ministry of reconciliation.”

The chapter that follows reflects on each of the preceding chapters, drawing together the foundational elements of each chapter in order to create a cohesive picture of why a trauma sensitive LGBTQIA+ community is a necessary component of a broader plan for creating affirming LGBTQIA+ ministries. As you will see, each foundation builds upon the last to show how science, history, theology, and even scripture can all point toward the directed reconciliation only possible through a trauma sensitive ministry for those worst effected by religious trauma.

The chapter will reflect on the project completed by this author-researcher and the results obtained to show how the results back up the hypothesis that “If members of Revolution Church participate in a training about contextualized ministries as a response to discrimination, they will view a LGBTQIA+ specific ministry as the better way to minister to that community.” While the data backed up the hypothesis, the following chapter will go into detail about how it also leaves room for expansion in future research.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

This project was the culmination of the experiences I have had as both a lay person and then as clergy, recognizing that the LGBTQIA+ community is underserved by the Church and that many attempts to serve the LGBTQIA+ community neglect to address the common traumas experienced by the LGBTQIA+ community at the hands of churches, clergy, and Christians. It is this problem that I elected to address with this document and my project, seeking to find and share the recipe for a trauma sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministry.

The project is scripturally rooted in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, specifically regarding the horizontal aspect of our ministry of reconciliation. It is in reconciling people with other people, or sometimes with the institution of the Church, that we find the core challenge in working with the LGBTQIA+ community. It is in this area of horizontal reconciliation that the ministry that seeks to be trauma sensitive and affirming of the LGBTQIA+ community must work.

Historically, the project draws from the wisdom and experience of our African American siblings in the years surrounding the Civil War, particularly with the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a result of discrimination. While the LGBTQIA+ experience is not in any way comparable to the experiences of a formerly

enslaved and systematically disenfranchised people, there is much wisdom to be gained by exploring the ways in which the African American community flourished in the face of such discrimination. An important one for the purpose of this document is the history of the formation of the AME Church as a direct result of the discrimination of the African American members of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The decision to form a church aimed at the needs of the African American community has proven to be a fruitful and culturally intelligent way to meet the needs of a people who were marginalized by the Caucasian-led Methodist Episcopal Church. This idea, the formation of a church designed to meet the needs of the community being marginalized by the larger church, forms the foundation of this trauma sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministry project.

This concept of a small, intentional community for those who have been marginalized by the larger community was further reinforced by my research into Boff's theory of Ecclesiogenesis. As he studied these small communities in Brazil, formed because a shortage of ordained clergy had left the poor without church services, he found all the hallmarks of a church. He found that these groups, formed organically when discrimination left them without a place to worship, took it upon themselves to provide for themselves all elements of church except for the sacraments. Boff even ends with the

belief that there was a theological argument to be made in favor of laity providing for themselves the sacraments¹.

The final piece of the puzzle was an understanding of how trauma affects the human brain and body, informing not only the need but also the method of trauma sensitive ministry. Understanding what causes triggers, the items or events that instigate a resurgence of traumatic memory, and the ways in which they operate on both a physiological and neurological level pointed toward ways in which a trauma sensitive ministry can adapt. This research also solidified that each trauma sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministry would need to be somewhat different in the ways in which they operate and mitigate for triggers. Especially when it comes to ideas like worship and religious iconography, what might be positive to one person could be triggering for another. Being aware of the people in the ministry, their triggers and their signs of distress, is key to creating a ministry that is safe for those whose trauma is rooted in Christianity.

All these elements came together into an understanding that effective ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community is trauma sensitive and focused specifically on that community as opposed to focused on integration into the larger church. While counter-cultural to the dominant pattern of church, focused around the Sunday congregational service, this method fits nicely into the framework of the Fresh Expressions movement. In this movement, these small and contextually driven ministries are created with a specific aim to reach those who are unlikely to enter the church building or attend the

¹ C. Mesters, "O futuro de nosso passado," *Uma Igreja que nasce do povo: comunidades eclesiais de base* (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1975): p. 146, quoted in Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiology: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*. *Twentieth Century Religious Thought*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), loc 895.

Sunday morning service. Fresh Expressions are already designed with their context and audience in mind, making a trauma sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministry an easy fit.

Methodology

The project was designed as a weekly workshop paired with a preaching series. Each workshop would take place on a Wednesday evening, preceded by a sermon on the same topic uploaded by Sunday morning. Because of the unique methodology of Revolution Church as a fully asynchronous church, the sermon and worship were posted online before Sunday to allow workshop participants the maximum amount of time to listen to the sermon before participating in the week's workshop. The sermon series allowed for both a wider dissemination of the core information surrounding the workshop than just the participants and also simplified preparation, with the creation of one sermon rather than a sermon and an educational lecture.

The workshop took place over zoom, as both Revolution Church and the specific participants, represented individuals from a variety of locations. While two participants were local to Lansing, Michigan, the other was from a South American country. The study began with more participants than those reflected in the final data, as some participants stopped attending the workshops before the final meeting and therefore the data could not be used properly triangulated. The remaining participants in this case study represented two members of clergy and one lay person, two of them Christian with the other one being Muslim who was familiar with both Jewish and Christian religious texts.

Two of the participants were self-described as members of the LGBTQIA+ community while the third was a cisgendered and heterosexual ally.

The workshop series was six weeks long, with topics following the first five chapters of this document, followed by a week exploring scriptures that are LGBTQIA+ affirming. The workshop started and ended with a survey containing identical questions to give a benchmark of where the participants were at the beginning of the project and where they changed after the six weeks of the project. This pre and post-survey forms the first data collection point and the one from which the data is triangulated using the other data collection methods employed.

During the workshops there would be a short educational time, during which the topic would be expanded upon from what was shared in the sermon. Because of the oral nature of a sermon and the wider audience, this time during the workshop would allow for the participants to be introduced to additional data that could not be incorporated into a sermonic treatment of the topic. This would also serve as a reminder for those who had listened to the sermon earlier in the week, priming them for the discussion.

The second data gathering point were the group discussions that followed the educational part of the workshop. There would be three targeted discussion questions connected to the week's topic. The participants would be prompted with the question, sometimes with clarifying or expanding statements when there seemed to be confusion or reticence toward answering, and the participants would be given the opportunity to discuss amongst themselves with only promptings of participants who had not spoken or had experience relevant to the question. It was through these discussion questions that the gradual change in thoughts and feelings could be seen, as they digested the information

and began to apply it to their own understanding of both the LGBTQIA+ community and ministry.

At the culmination of each week's workshop the participants would be left with a journaling prompt and the instructions to wait until at least the following day before writing the journal to allow themselves additional time to consider the material. These journals are the third data collection point. These journals were intended to allow for both continued processing for those individuals who may process and integrate information more slowly than others as well as an opportunity for participants to share information, opinions, or comments that they did not want to say in front of the other participants.

Finally, there were two data collection methods that were used more individually. Individual interviews were conducted over zoom with one participant who had missed sessions, allowing them to both answer discussion questions and comment more deeply on the subject matter. Additionally, one of the participants supplemented their journals with emails they sent to me and granted permission to be included in the data for this document. These sources are included as appropriate to further support the data shown in the primary data collection methods.

Implementation

This project was implemented over the course of six weeks, with each week's sermon being posted on the Saturday or Sunday preceding the Wednesday evening workshop. This was to give the participants the most amount of time possible to listen to that week's sermon before the workshop, during which the discussion questions reflected not only the content of the day's workshop but also the week's sermon. The workshops

began on Wednesday, September 27th, 2023 and culminated on Wednesday, November 1st, 2023. The meetings ran from 7pm Eastern time until 8:30 Eastern in order to ensure that all participants could work the meeting around both vocational responsibilities and family needs.

Participants were gathered from both the congregation of Revolution Church as well as the larger missional circle surrounding Revolution Church, individuals who support the mission and expansion of Revolution Church through their advice, prayers, and experiences. Given the current size of Revolution Church, combined with the even smaller portion of the community who are active in the online community forum, it was necessary to expand recruitment beyond solely members of the congregation in order to ensure a sufficient number of participants. The project began with six participants, reflecting two congregation members and four members of the missional circle. The final group, those who attended the workshops and filled out both the pre-survey and post-survey, were one congregation member, and two members of the mission circle.

These three individuals reflected two generations, two Baby Boomers and one Millennial. Two of the members were self-avowed members of the LGBTQIA+ community, while the third was a cisgendered and heterosexual ally. The participants reflected three different streams of religion, with one Catholic, one progressive Protestant Christian, and one progressive Muslim. One participant self-identified as ethnically Jewish while the other two were Caucasian. Two of the participants lived in the state of Michigan in the United States, while the third lived in Uruguay.

Due to the geographically diverse nature of both Revolution Church's membership and of the project participants, every element of the project was designed to

be implemented digitally. The sermons were posted, like all Revolution Church sermons, on Spotify's podcasting service and cross-posted onto most podcasting applications. This allowed the sermons to be downloaded and listened to whenever and wherever the participants wanted. The workshop meetings were done via the zoom video conferencing software, scheduled at 7pm Eastern to accommodate for the time difference between Michigan and Uruguay, allowing for all participants to be involved at the same time despite significant geographical distance. The surveys and journal entries were created in and distributed through Google's Forms software, giving participants secure access to the data collection methods without a way to see the data of any other participants, regardless of geographic location.

Prior to the first workshop meeting, all participants were given thirty days to read, consider, and sign the informed consent document. On the Saturday before the first workshop session all participants were sent the link to the podcasted recording of the week's sermon. The first session began with a short period for the participants to meet one another, a period for me to explain the purpose and process of the workshop, and a time for any questions and to ensure that all participants had a final opportunity to withdraw consent if desired. Participants were then given the link to the pre-survey and a period in which to complete the survey before workshop's content was discussed.

Each week of the workshop focused on one of the chapters of this document, with an additional final week that supplemented the post-survey with discussion of scriptural defenses for LGBTQIA+ affirmation. The workshop and sermon topics were in the following order:

9/23/23 – Sermon 1 – “Queer Church – Ministry of Reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).” Based on the Biblical Foundations chapter.

9/27/23 – Workshop based on Biblical Foundations chapter. Pre-survey given to participants. Journal Prompt 1 given to participants.

9/30/23 – Sermon 2 – “Queer Church – 2 – The Scope of the Problem.” Based on the Ministry Context chapter.

10/4/23 – Workshop based on Ministry Context chapter. Journal Prompt 2 given to participants.

10/7/23 – Sermon 3 – “Queer Church – 3 – A Look At History.” Based on the Historical Foundations chapter.

10/11/23 – Workshop based on Historical Foundations chapter. Journal Prompt 3 given to participants.

10/14/23 – Sermon 4 – “Queer Church – 4 – Creating a Community.” Based on the Theological Foundations chapter.

10/18/23 – Workshop based on Theological Foundations chapter. Journal Prompt 4 given to participants.

10/22/23 – Sermon 5 – “Queer Church – 5 – Religious Trauma.” Based on the Interdisciplinary Foundation chapter.

10/25/23 – Workshop based on Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter. Journal Prompt 5 given to participants.

10/29/23 – Sermon 6 – “Queer Church – 6 – Sharing Love, Not Fighting Hate.” Scriptural defenses for LGBTQIA+ affirmation in the Church.

11/1/23 – Workshop based on scriptural defenses for LGBTQIA+ affirmation in the Church. Post-survey given.

During each workshop after the first, the conversation began with a question designed to lead the participants into reflection on the previous week's topic and the journaling they had done. This was designed to allow for greater input from participants who may take a longer time to process information, giving a second chance for any comments or thoughts that may have occurred to those participants during the intervening week. While these periods of reflection did not contribute much to the overall data, they did give additional opportunities for data collection and served to emphasize the connected nature of the sessions' topics.

Following the opening question, the sessions moved to an educational element. This element was designed to expand upon the sermon, giving hard data and additional details that would not have worked within the medium of a sermon. This served not only as an avenue to deepen the participants' knowledge about the week's topic, but also a way to remind the participants of the content from the sermon, in case any of it had been forgotten in the intervening days. While not an intended consequence of these educational elements of the workshop, questions regarding the facts led to significant moments of conversation between the participants that further bolstered the gathered data.

After the educational portion came the discussion period, the major data collection point of each workshop. The participants would be given one question at a time, designed to guide the participants into a deeper consideration of the subject matter and the ways in which the subject matter might interact with ministry to the LGBTQIA+

community, and given time both for direct answers and further conversation. The data gained from both the direct answers to the questions as well as the resulting conversation, as will be shown in the summary of learnings, greatly contributed to a reinforcing of the data gathered from the pre/post surveys and journals. As expected, the resulting conversations often diverged significantly from the targeted subject matter, but usually in ways that were beneficial to the larger discussion about trauma sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministry.

At the end of each workshop, except for the final one, the participants were given a journaling prompt. This prompt was always related to the questions they had been asked during the discussion period. The intention of this was to allow the participants not only more time for reflection on the topic, but also to give those who communicate better through writing than conversation a chance to express themselves about the topic in the way they find more comfortable. These journal responses provided valuable data to back up the results seen in the pre/post survey.

Summary of Learnings

Before being able to analyze what was learned from the collected data, the first step is to analyze the data collected before the session began. This data was collected during the pre-survey, before the participants went through any of the workshop sessions and listened to anything but the initial sermon, based on the scripture upon which the entire project stands. These answers are the closest to the baseline views of the participants as it was possible for me to obtain during this project given the format.

For the sake of both anonymity and clarity when referring to the three participants, they will be referred to as Picard, Kirk, and Sisko. These pseudonyms, based on Captains from Star Trek shows, were chosen with no specific association between the character and any attribute of the participants. As often as possible the participants will be referred to through aggregate data, but there are moments where differentiation is necessary for the clarity of the resulting data.

The first question in the survey asked the participants to list any words that they associated with Christianity and Christian Church/Ministries. While all three participants named positive associations with Christianity, two of the three also included negative associations. Two of the participants listed community as an association they had with Christianity, one of them further explaining that said community could be either enlightening or limiting. The third participant listed several traditional church words; God, faith, Jesus, grace, and sin; alongside the word trauma.

The second question asked the participants to reflect on their own past experiences with churches. This was done both to get a better understanding of the participants' views of the church as well as the potentially give some deeper understanding of why certain words were chosen. Sisko, who commented on both the positive and negative aspects of community, commented in this second question about having a mixed experience with churches. They expressed that "some are focused on true Christianity, others create an "us and them" view of the world." It would stand to reason that this "us and them" view that Sisko comments on would be one of the same limitations commented on with regard to community.

Picard, whose word associations were mostly Christian buzzwords but included the word trauma in the list, answered the question regarding past church experiences with a story.

I was raised without church for the most part but wanted something and tagged along with my grandparents to their conservative Church of Christ. There I heard messages of hell and repentance. How the only way to heaven was perfection and that any deviation from what the pastor told us was sin and would end us up in hell. It took me a long time after that to reconcile church, religious, my beliefs, and God.

Picard, who expressed in the workshop sessions that they were transgender, struggled to reconcile the theology that they were taught during their experience with the conservative Church of Christ, particularly regarding gender and gender identity, with their own burgeoning understanding of their own sexuality and gender identity.

Most important among the question in the survey is question three, where the participants are asked to choose between two ways of doing ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community based on which one they think is better. While the language of the question was left intentionally vague in order to not pollute their thinking by unnecessarily narrowing the parameters, this had the unintended effect of causing confusion, with participants asking for clarification while taking both the pre-survey and post-survey. Participants asked what they should do if they thought that both forms of ministry could be good. Participants were told to choose the ministry that they thought would be better.

Participants were given the possible answers of “Integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members”

and “A specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry.” These options were given because the integration option has been the default option chosen by churches, bringing LGBTQIA+ Christians into their existing services. Conversely, my research points to there being a need for a specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry. My hypothesis rests on the assumption that before attending my workshop most participants would believe that the integration option would be the better ministry option for LGBTQIA+ individuals. The initial data backs up this assumption, with two of the three participants choosing “integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members” as the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population.

The following question provided the participants a numerical scale with which they could indicate how equipped they feel to start or run an LGBTQIA+ focused ministry. The scale went from one, indicating that they feel not at all equipped, to ten indicating that they feel completely equipped. Following the numerical portion of the question there was a question asking for an explanation of the number they chose. Given that the participant group was split between clergy and laity, I was unsurprised to see that the numerical responses were eight from each of the clergy and two from the laity. What was more interesting were the written responses. The laity participant responded that the low score was because they had no personal interest in ministry.

Meanwhile, each of the clergy members of the participant group responded with information reflecting on their own sexuality and/or gender identity in the context of the high score they gave themselves. Picard responded “Working toward ordination and being transgender male makes me uniquely gifted to help bring about change in the cis-

normative world. There are those who's gifts lead them to shepherd the hurt and traumatized, but I see my place in building allies and fighting from inside." Meanwhile Sisko replied "I am open to and love everyone, but I'm a cis hetero person, so my knowledge and ability to relate to all issues in the LGBTQIA+ community may be lacking at times."

What interested me about these initial surveys was that both participants reflected on both their call to ministry and their own gender identity and/or sexuality. In the case of Picard, it was their identity that they viewed as their strength, mitigated by their calling being to create allies instead of tending directly to the LGBTQIA+ community. Meanwhile Sisko reflected that their call to a ministry that is intentionally inclusive and affirming of all people was the strength, one that was mitigated by their own sexuality and gender identity in that they did not have the experience of being a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. At the pre-survey stage, the numbers themselves were not themselves important except that I had hypothesized as a secondary effect of the workshop that in addition to viewing intentional, focused LGBTQIA+ ministry as the more effective way to do ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community, it would also lead the participants to feel better equipped to start or run such a ministry.

In the post surveys the first result visible from the project, and not one that had been named as an expected result, was that the participants uniformly showed a positive view of Christianity and the Christian Church/Ministries in the word association question. While two of the three participants had answered the pre-survey with a mixture of positive and negative words, all three participants answered with exclusively positive words in the post-survey. Picard, who had used the word trauma in their pre-survey,

responded in the post-survey with “Jesus, God, love, hope, grace, peace, joy, church, Church.” Sisko, whose pre-survey answer was a nuanced picture of how community could be positive or negative, replied “love, acceptance, inclusivity, faith, healing.” Kirk, whose pre-survey had mentioned only faith and community, responded in the post-survey with “grace, love, heaven, Jesus, Holy Spirit.” In these responses it appears as though all three participants, regardless of whether their original responses were positive or mixed, responded to the post-project survey with a more positive set of word associations than their original.

The most notable result was the question regarding which way of doing ministry with that LGBTQIA+ community was better. The majority of the participants (66.6%) indicated on the original survey that they believed the better way of doing ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community was to “integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members.” In the pre-survey only one of the three participants indicated that they believed “a specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry” would be the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community. The post-project survey showed a significant change in these results. Following completion of the project, 100% of participants answered that “a specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry” would be the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community.

This response is significant to the research because it seems to confirm my hypothesis that “If members of Revolution Church participate in a training about contextualized ministries as a response to discrimination, they will view a LGBTQIA+ specific ministry as the better way to minister to that community.” But the data from a

single survey cannot alone be considered confirmation of the hypothesis. Picard wrote in their journal entry about how the founding of the AME Church can translate into LGBTQIA+ ministry, “It made me think to take matters into our own hands. We don’t have to wait for the establishments to ‘get it right’ or do right by us, but we can do right for ourselves.” In their answer to the same journal prompt, Sisko said, “While being open to all, you have to prioritize taking care of your own when no one else will.”

In the discussions during the workshops, all three participants made comments that pointed to this change in perspective toward contextualized ministries for LGBTQIA+ instead of integration-based ministries. In a discussion surrounding the statistics of LGBTQIA+ suicide attempts and mental health issues, Kirk said, “and in terms of an LGBT focused ministry, you know, I mean it could not possibly make the statistics worse. You know it depends on what the source of the self-hate was. If it was religious based, then certainly it would... reduce any sort of religion-based shame or self-hate.” Sisko responded later in the same conversation, when discussing religious trauma, “I thought, you know, the idea of having an LGBTQIA+ church is so critical because you want that community to know when they walk in that there is no question of acceptance or safety.” In discussing their own story of moving from religious trauma to vocational ministry, Picard spoke of the value of seeing people in ministry who are LGBTQIA+. “They feel a little more power in their lives because they know that, okay, she can stand up there and do this. Maybe I can do big things too. Not necessarily that they feel a calling, but just that that makes them feel like they have some power in their lives too.”

As the workshop continued, participants routinely made comments pointing to benefits of contextual ministries. In their answer to the journal prompt relating to

LGBTQIA+ discrimination and their own experiences, Sisko said, “My thought was to go back to something akin to the early pre-Roman church – relatively informal gatherings in safe spaces.” While not specifically about LGBTQIA+ people, this comment points to the house churches that were common in the first century during the days before Christianity was an accepted religion.

When discussing doing ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community in a trauma-informed way, Picard brought up another important aspect of any contextualized ministry with a marginalized people group. “First thing would be to hire LGBTQIA+ clergy, ministerial staff, leaders, however you want to phrase it... One big thing would be for us to put people that look like them in those places of power that can then speak to how to help do things, how to help start to maneuver things.” Kirk gets at the benefits of this in their journal entry response to the prompt about the benefits of a small, intentional community. “More intimacy, trust, and the ability to meet more of the needs required for each individual.”

Through these responses, from all three data sources and all three participants, it is clear that all of the participants experienced a change in perspective regarding contextualized ministries and the LGBTQIA+ community. While 2/3 of the participants began the workshop believing that integration-based ministries were better, the change in perspective is seen through the discussions and journal prompts, culminating in a change during the post-project survey. Ultimately 100% of the participants left the project feeling that contextualized ministries were a better idea for LGBTQIA+ ministries than simply integrating the LGBTQIA+ population into existing, affirming churches.

A more surprising find from the post-project survey was with regard to how well-equipped the participants felt after the project as opposed to how they had felt before. The assumption going into the project was that, after hearing about how contextualized ministries were more effective for marginalized groups like the LGBTQIA+ population, the participants would feel more equipped to run or start such a ministry. Instead the responses that came in were minimal changes from the participants' original scores, but largely in the opposite direction from what I had expected. While Picard and Sisko had both scored themselves at an 8/10 on the first survey, Picard's level rose to a 9/10 while Kirk's dropped to a 7/10. Kirk, who had initially rated themselves a 2/10 in the pre-survey placed themselves at a 1/10 in the post-project survey.

As with the original responses, the explanations provided by the participants assisted in understanding the core they gave themselves. While Kirk's score dropped from 2/10 to 1/10, their explanation remained similar, with both of the explanations referenced their lack of interest in ministry. Sisko, whose score also dropped from an 8/10 to a 7/10, said

I am the equivalent of a minister in an inclusive Islamic Sufi community with a surprisingly high percentage of LGBTQ+ people. It seems to be working, but as a cis male heterosexual, I have not been in the skin of LGBTQ+ people, so I assume my life experience does not provide as much as an LGBTQ+ person may have to offer.

In the cases of both Kirk and Sisko, the decrease could be a symptom of an unexpected side-effect of sharing the information about trauma and LGBTQIA+ struggles. While the project gave the participants an idea of how to address some of the challenges, it is possible but not confirmed from the available data that the participants

had underestimated the severity of the problem. For an individual with no intention of going into ministry and one who was already cautious of their limitations as a cisgendered heterosexual person, this could explain the self-assessment of feeling less equipped than they did during the pre-survey.

Picard, however, noted an increase in their feeling of being equipped from an 8/10 to a 9/10. While both answers were founded upon the understanding that as a transgendered male, they had a lived experience that would be valuable to an LGBTQIA+ focused ministry, while the pre-survey's comment ended with a comment about their calling to create allies from the outside, the post-survey said "also, so much of the workshop built on my information." So, while the information in the workshop left Kirk and Sisko with a greater understanding of the problem, the same information left Picard with an understanding that their experiences and understanding of the LGBTQIA+ community was something that could be built upon.

While the intention had been for this question to show evidence of the participants being better equipped for ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community, it would appear that such a goal was unrealistic for the scope and duration of the workshop. What appears to be true from the both the surveys and the corroborating data is that the workshop did succeed in increasing the participants' understanding of the problems surrounding LGBTQIA+ ministry. In the journal prompt asking what a "ministry of reconciliation" might look like among the LGBTQIA+ community, Picard said "No tokenism or 'welcome but don't...' situations." This comment clearly references the prevalence of conditional or incomplete welcome for members of the LGBTQIA+ community in churches. They continue, "A church that doesn't see me as transgender but as human,"

referring to the tendency of less-affirming churches to view LGBTQIA+ people in terms of their sexuality or gender identity rather than as a normal person.

Sisko comments in their journal entry relating to LGBTQIA+ discrimination in the church, “The trauma associated with the trappings of churches and how connecting with a traditional formal church setting can trigger things was interesting to hear,” reflecting on the prevalence of religious trauma triggers being common elements of formal church worship. The prevalence of these kinds of traumatic triggers mentioned by Picard and Sisko are referenced by Kirk in their journal reflection on how an understanding of trauma psychology might change ministry. They said “certainly It raises an awareness of the potential existence of trauma, although you mentioned that you pretty much presuppose the existence of trauma among the LGBTQ community.”

In the workshop discussions, participants began to recognize ways in which the trauma triggers common to LGBTQIA+ individuals would be worse in a traditional church. Picard stated, “being in a larger group or church community would be more triggering, triggering similar to whatever trauma trigger may or may not have shooed them away, pushed them out, scared them away. So being in a smaller, intentional, or pop-up community as such would be more intimate, feel safer.” Sisko told a story in the fifth workshop about a LGBTQIA+ individual who had once attended their ministry. “I was considered a threat and made her uncomfortable,” they explained, showcasing how a cisgendered and heterosexual clergy person can themselves sometimes be a trigger for LGBTQIA+ individuals with religious trauma.

Picard points out later in the same workshop that this kind of religious trauma is not restricted to laity. They reflected on a fellow clergyperson whose husband is

transgender. When appointed to a church they chose not to reveal their husband's gender identity and soon learned that the church was far less affirming than they appeared, even making transphobic jokes in the clergy person's presence. "But they traumatized her as an extension of him. And so now, for the past like two and a half years, she hasn't been serving a church. She's not sure if she's going to go back to it." This shows that the common reaction to religious trauma, not just avoiding the specific church that caused the trauma but all churches, goes beyond laity to those serving within the church system when they experience religious trauma.

Such an increase in understanding is a significant achievement on its own, with such an understanding being critical for the success of any trauma-sensitive ministry. Understanding the trauma suffered by the target population will allow those ministering to better avoid triggers and speak to areas of trauma. This therefore gives a stronger foundation upon which a workshop focusing on equipping participants for ministry to the LGBTQIA+ community could be built. It is likely that the current trends of integration-based LGBTQIA+ ministry are built upon the dearth of understanding of the specifics and severity of trauma experienced by many LGBTQIA+ individuals at the hands of Christians and church groups. This dearth of understanding would logically lead to individuals being blind to potential barriers present in integration-based ministries. This is an area ripe for further study and scholarship.

Ultimately, what was learned from this project was that participants who complete a workshop focusing on LGBTQIA+ discrimination, trauma-sensitivity, and contextualized ministries will find LGBTQIA+ focused contextualized ministry to be the better way to reach and minister to the LGBTQIA+ population. Additionally, it was

learned that this same information will not increase the majority of participants' feeling of being equipped to start or run such a ministry. However, the participants' understanding of the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ ministry, particularly connected to the reasons why trauma-sensitive ministry is necessary for that population, will increase. Therefore, while this project succeeded in showing that contextual ministry is the better way to reach and minister to the LGBTQIA+ population, more work is needed to equip individuals to start or run such a ministry.

Conclusion

From the first chapter about the ministry context, we looked at how the statistics show LGBTQIA+ individuals being more disengaged with the church than their cisgendered, heterosexual peers. The facts show that the LGBTQIA+ populations feels statistically less safe in church environments than their cisgendered and heterosexual peers. It is here that we saw the problem clearly so we could work to tackle it effectively.

In the second chapter we saw the scriptural foundation of this whole project, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21. In this we saw that the “ministry of reconciliation” is not just vertical (between man and God) but also horizontal (between people). It is this horizontal aspect that is necessary for the ministry proposed by this project to address in order to positively affect the vertical relationship. Often, LGBTQIA+ Christians report the wounds from horizontal relationships being the catalyst for their vertical disconnection, and so the horizontal must be addressed.

In chapter three we addressed one of the major ways to help heal the horizontal relational disconnects when we looked at the formation of the African Methodist

Episcopal Church after the discrimination of the African American members of St.

George's Methodist Episcopal Church. Through the founding of the AME we learned how discrimination can get in the way of effective worship and how a means of restoring that horizontal relationship can be the formation of a contextualized ministry designed to serve the marginalized population. While we absolutely do not want to equalize or compare the experience of formerly enslaved Americans with the LGBTQIA+ population, there is much our ministry learned and can benefit from the experience and tenacity of our African American forebears.

In chapter four we looked at the theological foundation for our project, Leonardo Boff's theology of ecclesiology. For his research, Boff looked at the formation of small "base communities" in Brazil formed by laity when classism on the part of the Catholic Church left them with a clergy shortage. These small communities, only dissimilar from Revolution Church by the fact that they lacked ordained clergy, created for themselves every aspect of church that was permissible without an ordained clergyperson present. It is here that we see the theological underpinnings of a small, marginalized community creating church for itself.

In chapter five we wrapped it all together by looking at how trauma functions in the human brain and nervous system. By better understanding the different ways in which trauma can present and the different things that can trigger traumatic reactions, we can better understand the religiously traumatized members of the LGBTQIA+ community we are seeking to serve. It is here that we can begin to understand trauma sensitivity and the ways in which the ministry proposed by this project must be different than the traditional

church ministry in order to meet the religious needs of the LGBTQIA+ community without triggering traumatic responses.

When we put it all together, we find a form of ministry that is both modern and ancient, unique and derived from the past successes of the church. Ultimately, in terms of addressing the hypothesis that “If members of Revolution Church participate in a training about contextualized ministries as a response to discrimination, they will view a LGBTQIA+ specific ministry as the better way to minister to that community,” the workshop was a qualified success. The evidence gathered showed that participants’ views about contextualized ministry for LGBTQIA+ individuals versus integration-based ministries for LGBTQIA+ individuals significantly over a six-week workshop. At the beginning of the workshop, 33% of the participants indicated that they believed that contextualized ministries would be a better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community. Following the workshop, 100% of the participants indicated that contextualized ministries would be a better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community. This supports project’s central hypothesis.

The success is qualified firstly because the original intent was to increase the participants’ feeling of being equipped to start or run such a ministry. The data shows that this goal was largely unsuccessful, with 66% of participants showing a 10% decrease in their self-measurement of how equipped they feel to run such a ministry. While this is likely because of an increased understanding of the challenges inherent in trauma-sensitive LGBTQIA+ ministry, this goal was ultimately unsuccessful during the six weeks of the workshop. This area is ripe for further scholarship, but would likely require either a lengthened version of this workshop that provides more equipping or a second

workshop focused on equipping individuals for trauma-sensitive ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community.

The second reason the project is a qualified success is because there are elements of the project that panned out in a less ideal way than the original plan. While the workshop provided data that supported the hypothesis, the sample size was smaller than originally intended. The smaller sample size is due to a number of overlapping factors. Firstly, due to the early stage of Revolution Church's development, there were both fewer members to recruit into the project and a less robust online community for these invitations to be communicated through. In addition, while seven participants were originally reached out to for this project, only three completed the workshop and were therefore able to be used in the final data. Of the seven original participants, two dropped out before the beginning of the workshop due to conflicts in their schedule. Of the remaining five, two more participants attended some of the workshop sessions but did not complete enough of the workshop for their data to be usable.

Were this project to be replicated, it would be at a later stage of Revolution Church's development, when both the number of members was larger and the online community more robust, allowing for a larger sample size from inside of the church community. Were this project to be replicated with a larger sample size, it would be valuable to see whether the results would be significantly different in terms of the participants' change in belief regarding the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community. Additionally, this project would be expanded beyond the original six-week deadline. Such an expansion would allow for additional lessons aimed at equipping the participants to start or run such a ministry themselves. Such an expanded

workshop could succeed where this workshop failed, helping to leave the participants more equipped for LGBTQIA+ ministry after the completion of the workshop.

Ultimately, this project best functions as a foundation for future research on LGBTQIA+ ministry. Building upon this research, including projects that expand the sample size of the original project to confirm this project's findings, would help to bolster the current state of ministry research relating directly to the LGBTQIA+ community. In building upon this research, further scholarship could explore topics related to specific trauma-sensitive methodologies that best serve religiously traumatized LGBTQIA+ individuals, ways to apply some of these methodologies to larger worship settings to increase comfort among the LGBTQIA+ community in those settings, or any number of modifications to expand our ability to effectively reach and minister to the LGBTQIA+ community without triggering their existing religious trauma.

APPENDIX A
PARTICIPANT PRE/POST SURVEYS

12/14/23, 7:48 PM

Queer Church Pre-Survey

Queer Church Pre-Survey

The opening survey for the Queer Church doctoral workshop.

Name *

[REDACTED] Kirk

What are some words you associate with Christianity and Christian Church/Ministries? *

Faith, community

What have your past experiences with churches? *

Mixed over the years, although I am a regular churchgoer (Catholic).

Which do you think is the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population? *

- ☒ Integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members.
- ☐ A specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry.

12/14/23, 7:48 PM

Queer Church Pre-Survey

How equipped do you feel to start or run an LGBTQIA+ focused ministry? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all equipped	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very equipped

Why did you choose the number you did for question 4? *

I am not personally interested in ministry.

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12/14/23, 7:39 PM

Queer Church Post-Survey

Queer Church Post-Survey

The opening survey for the Queer Church doctoral workshop.

Email *

[REDACTED]

Name *

[REDACTED] Kirk

What are some words you associate with Christianity and Christian Church/Ministries? *

grace, love, heaven, Jesus, Holy Spirit

What have your past experiences with churches? *

Mixed. Any time I encountered a hostile church I just moved on.

Which do you think is the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population? *

- ☐ Integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members.
- ☒ A specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry.

12/14/23, 7:39 PM

Queer Church Post-Survey

How equipped do you feel to start or run an LGBTQIA+ focused ministry? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all equipped	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Very equipped

Why did you choose the number you did for question 4? *

I am not in ministry and have no plans to enter ministry.

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12/14/23, 7:50 PM

Queer Church Pre-Survey

Queer Church Pre-Survey

The opening survey for the Queer Church doctoral workshop.

Name *



Picard

What are some words you associate with Christianity and Christian Church/Ministries? *

God Jesus faith grace trauma sin

What have your past experiences with churches? *

I was raised without church for the most part but wanted something and tagged along with my grandparents to their conservative Church of Christ. There I heard messages of hell and repentance. How the only way to heaven was perfection and that any deviation from what the pastor told us was a sin and would end us up in hell.

It took me a long time after that to reconcile church, religion, my beliefs, and God.

Which do you think is the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population? *



Integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members.



A specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry.

12/14/23, 7:50 PM

Queer Church Pre-Survey

How equipped do you feel to start or run an LGBTQIA+ focused ministry? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all equipped	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	Very equipped

Why did you choose the number you did for question 4? *

Working toward ordination and being transgender make me uniquely gifted to help bring about change in the cis-normative world. There are those who's gifts lead them to shepherd the hurt and traumatized, but I see my place in building allies and fighting from inside.

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12/14/23, 7:43 PM

Queer Church Post-Survey

Queer Church Post-Survey

The opening survey for the Queer Church doctoral workshop.

Email *

[REDACTED]

Name *

[REDACTED] Picard

What are some words you associate with Christianity and Christian Church/Ministries? *

Jesus, God, love, hope, grace, peace, joy, church, Church

What have your past experiences with churches? *

I grew up attending a Church of Christ which was very evangelical and it put a fear in me that had me scared away for awhile. When I met my wife, we church shopped, as she was raised in the church and wanted to stay connected. It was hard for us to find a church where we felt fully connected and welcomed. It was as we were having our first child we found a church because of a newspaper article that highlighted their "Lesbian Pastor" and we attended there for 6-7 years. We then found our way to our current church after looking for a more robust children's program. This church I've also found a home as a transperson in the congregation, as well as at the regional and national levels.

12/14/23, 7:43 PM

Queer Church Post-Survey

Which do you think is the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population? *

- ☐ Integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members.
- ☒ A specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry.

How equipped do you feel to start or run an LGBTQIA+ focused ministry? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all equipped ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ Very equipped

Why did you choose the number you did for question 4? *

being trans I feel strongly that I can help run an LGBTQ ministry. Also, so much of the workshop built on my information

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12/14/23, 7:49 PM

Queer Church Pre-Survey

Queer Church Pre-Survey

The opening survey for the Queer Church doctoral workshop.

Name *



Sisko

What are some words you associate with Christianity and Christian Church/Ministries? *

Community - which can be enlightening or limiting depending on the community, spiritual guidance, sharing.

What have your past experiences with churches? *

Mixed - some are focused on true Christianity, others create an "us and them" view of the world.

Which do you think is the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population? *



Integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members.



A specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry.

12/14/23, 7:49 PM

Queer Church Pre-Survey

How equipped do you feel to start or run an LGBTQIA+ focused ministry? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all equipped	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	Very equipped

Why did you choose the number you did for question 4? *

I am open to and love everyone, but I'm a cis hetero person, so my knowledge and ability to relate to all issues in the LGBTQIA+ community may be lacking at times.

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12/14/23, 7:44 PM

Queer Church Post-Survey

Queer Church Post-Survey

The opening survey for the Queer Church doctoral workshop.

Email *

[REDACTED]

Name *

[REDACTED] Sisko

What are some words you associate with Christianity and Christian Church/Ministries? *

Love, acceptance, inclusivity, community, faith, healing.

What have your past experiences with churches? *

N/A as I am not Christian, but as an observer, it depends on whether a ministry is guiding people to God or dividing people over cherry-picking scripture to justify how one wants God to behave.

Which do you think is the better way to do ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population? *

- ☐ Integrate the LGBTQIA+ population into existing churches of LGBTQIA+ and cisgendered/heterosexual members.
- ☒ A specific LGBTQIA+ focused church or ministry.

12/14/23, 7:44 PM

Queer Church Post-Survey

How equipped do you feel to start or run an LGBTQIA+ focused ministry? *

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all equipped	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐	Very equipped

Why did you choose the number you did for question 4? *

I am the equivalent of a minister in an inclusive Islamic Sufi community with a surprisingly high percentage of LGBTQ+ people. It seems to be working, but as a sis male heterosexual, I have not been in the skin of LGBTQ+ people, so I assume my life experience does not provide as much as an LGBTQ+ person may have to offer.

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APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT JOURNAL RESPONSES

12/14/23, 8:04 PM

Queer Church - Week 1 Journal

Queer Church - Week 1 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Kirk**What could a “ministry of reconciliation” toward the LGBTQIA+ community look like? ***

Convincing members of the LGBTQIA+ community that God does in fact love us and that they should want to worship God together with other members of the community.

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12/14/23, 8:07 PM

Queer Church - Week 3 Journal

Queer Church - Week 3 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Kirk

What can we learn from the founding of the AME Church that translates into ministry to the LGBTQIA+ population? *

Not sure if I answered this already during the session but the AME Church had a local community and they had at least partial ownership of the building. These things are not possible with an online-only church, which can reach a far broader audience.

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12/14/23, 8:08 PM

Queer Church - Week 4 Journal

Queer Church - Week 4 Journal

Email *

Kirk

What benefits might come from a small, intentional community rather than a larger community? *

The biggest benefit is a common interest from the outset.

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12/14/23, 8:08 PM

Queer Church - Week 5 Journal

Queer Church - Week 5 Journal

Email *

Name *

Kirk

How might an understanding of trauma psychology change the way we do ministry? *

Certainly it creates an awareness of the potential existence of trauma although you mentioned that you pretty much presuppose the existence of trauma among the LGBTQ community. No minister is obligated to apologize for the misdeeds of others rather the affirming minister can let it be known from the outset that this space is totally affirming and thus the congregants should feel more at ease discussing prior trauma with the minister.

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12/14/23, 8:05 PM

Queer Church - Week 1 Journal

Queer Church - Week 1 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Picard**What could a “ministry of reconciliation” toward the LGBTQIA+ community look like? ***

a church that lets us lead and be fully a part of all parts. No tokenism or “welcome but don’t ...” situations. A church that works on and studies LGBTQ topics and advocates for inclusion within the wider Church. a church that doesn’t see me as transgender but as human. somewhere I can speak of my trauma but not have to be the one doing the work all the time to heal it. The church has been so involved in the trauma of LGBTQ folk, whether in the church or not, that they need to do the work to begin the healing; it cannot just be the traumatized that do it or it will continue to repeat.

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12/14/23, 8:05 PM

Queer Church - Week 1 Journal

Queer Church - Week 1 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Picard

What could a “ministry of reconciliation” toward the LGBTQIA+ community look like? *

the Church atoning for, admitting, and working to make up for the harm and trauma it has caused over decades. This is acts of service, allyship, learning, growing ... and pushing into unknown areas. Reconciliation isn't between LGBTQ people and God, it needs to happen between the Church and LGBTQ people; for LGBTQ people.

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12/14/23, 8:07 PM

Queer Church - Week 3 Journal

Queer Church - Week 3 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Picard

What can we learn from the founding of the AME Church that translates into ministry to the LGBTQIA+ population? *

It made me think to take matters into our own hands. We don't have to wait for the establishments to "get it right" or do right by us, but we can do right for ourselves. The AME shows how we can peacefully and yet resolutely demand and take our freedom from religious persecution.

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12/14/23, 8:08 PM

Queer Church - Week 5 Journal

Queer Church - Week 5 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Picard**How might an understanding of trauma psychology change the way we do ministry? ***

Our ability to be mindful of this actually creates safe spaces where people can learn, grow, love, and be loved.

This understanding will change our approach from one of "traditions" to one of "cutting edge". We will push the Church into a new dawning with spaces that are inclusive and bold.

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12/14/23, 8:04 PM

Queer Church - Week 1 Journal

Queer Church - Week 1 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Sisko**What could a “ministry of reconciliation” toward the LGBTQIA+ community look like? ***

A safe space that would prioritize the comfort and spiritual needs of the LGBTQ+ community, but hopefully in the long run will help dissolve any barrier between various people who live differently from each other.

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12/14/23, 8:07 PM

Queer Church - Week 2 Journal

Queer Church - Week 2 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Sisko

What from your own experiences came up during the sermon and discussion about the problem of LGBTQIA+ discrimination in the church? *

The trauma associated with the trappings of churches and how connecting with a traditional formal church setting can trigger things was interesting to hear. My thought was to go back to something akin to the early pre-Roman church - relatively informal gatherings in safe spaces.

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12/14/23, 8:07 PM

Queer Church - Week 3 Journal

Queer Church - Week 3 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Sisko

What can we learn from the founding of the AME Church that translates into ministry to the LGBTQIA+ population? *

While being open to all, you have to prioritize taking care of your own when no one else will.

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12/14/23, 8:08 PM

Queer Church - Week 4 Journal

Queer Church - Week 4 Journal

Email *

 Sisko

What benefits might come from a small, intentional community rather than a larger community? *

More intimacy, trust, and the ability to meet more of the needs required for each individual.

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12/14/23, 8:08 PM

Queer Church - Week 5 Journal

Queer Church - Week 5 Journal

Email *

Name *

 Sisko**How might an understanding of trauma psychology change the way we do ministry? ***

People who have been traumatized need to have their triggers acknowledged, and within possible, functional reason, accommodated.

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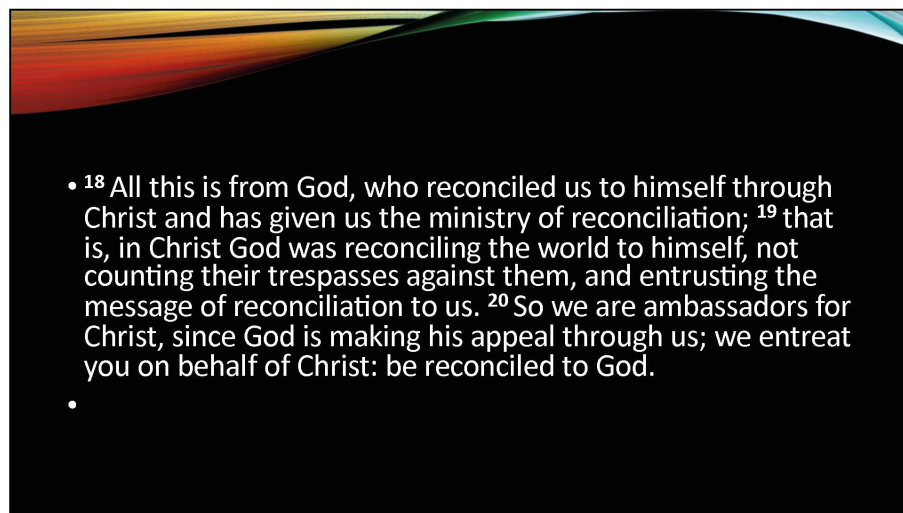
APPENDIX C

WORKSHOP POWERPOINTS

12/15/23



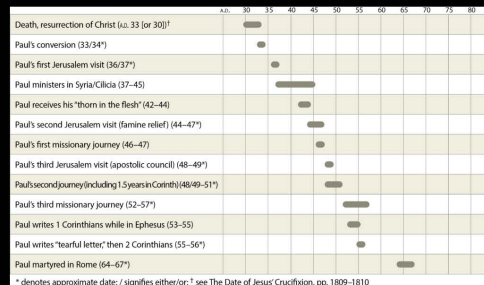
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2

ABOUT 2 CORINTHIANS

- Rather than a single letter, 2 Corinthians is a collection of fragments from letters between Paul and the city of Corinth over a time period around 55-57 CE.



3

ABOUT CORINTH

- The Population of Corinth was pulled from the poor, meaning that the majority of those in Corinth were not Roman but Syrians, Egyptians, and Jewish. Men and women "of no nationality and of a civilization not their own."
- Instead of the relative uniformity of the populations of most Roman cities, Corinth was unusually diverse and made up of primarily marginalized populations.

4

RECONCILIATION

- *This is the usual language of N.T., in which the change which brings about the reconciliation between God and men is regarded as taking place in them rather than in Him. Greeks thought of God as estranged from men, and it was He who needed to be won over. Jews thought rather that it was men who by their sins were estranged from God, and the sins had to be 'cleansed,' or 'purged,' or 'covered,' in order to bring about reconciliation (see on 1 Jn. 2:2). St Paul follows Jewish rather than Hellenic thought. It is man who is reconciled to God, rather than God to man.*

• Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1999), 2 Cor. 5:18.

5

- God does not do the changing. What changes is our hearts or the circumstances.
- Commonly the focus is on our hearts doing the changing, but given the context it's more likely that Paul is talking about the circumstances having changed.
- Before Jesus, the citizens of Corinth who weren't Jewish could not have been reconciled to God regardless of the state of their hearts.

6

- *The basic idea of reconciliation is the restoration of friendly relationships after a period of enmity or estrangement. In the NT it appears to be an essentially Pauline concept, since the verb καταλλάσσω and its cognates appear only in the Pauline literature. The language is found in secular Greek,¹⁶⁶² but plays no significant part in religious vocabulary. As a religious term, it is infrequent in Greek-speaking Judaism also.*

- Thrall, *II Corinthians I-VII*, 2 Cor. 5:18.

7

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL RECONCILIATION

- Tizon speaks to different elements of reconciliation, stating the importance of horizontal reconciliation that he defines as being “peacemaking, between people and people.” He goes on to state that “lest we think that the misguided prioritization of evangelism over justice speaks only of the colonial past, horizontal sin committed by vertically reconciled Christians continues to this day,” before pointing out several example of latent racism hiding under the guise of contextualization.

- Al Tizon, R.P. DeBorst, and R. Sider, *Whole and Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 173.
- Tizon, *Whole and Reconciled*, 175.

8

- 
- It's therefore likely, given the religious infrequency of the word and the diverse and marginalized population of Corinth, that Paul is speaking of horizontal reconciliation between Christians, who at the time were still considered a subset of the Jewish faith, and people who were otherized by the Jewish faith.
 - This horizontal reconciliation would have been necessary before a religious community could have been founded and would have to be continuous as it grew.

9

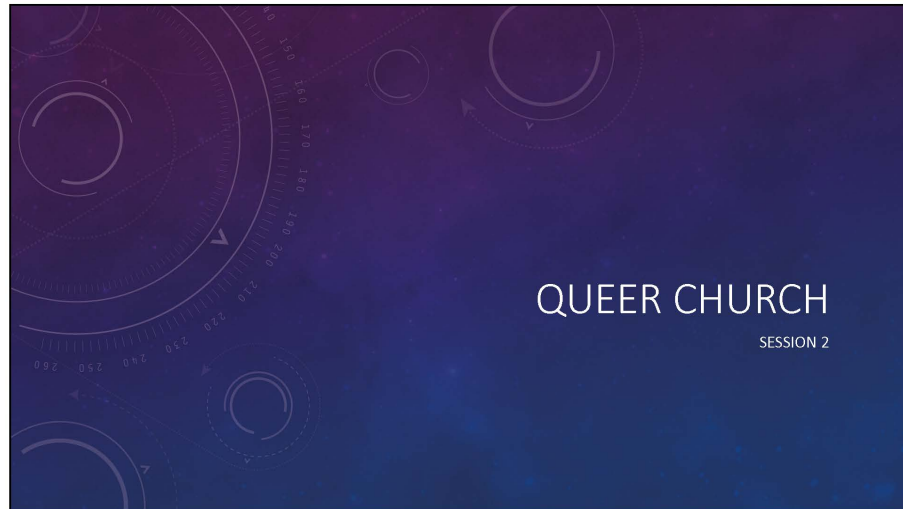


CONNECTIONS TO QUEER CHURCH

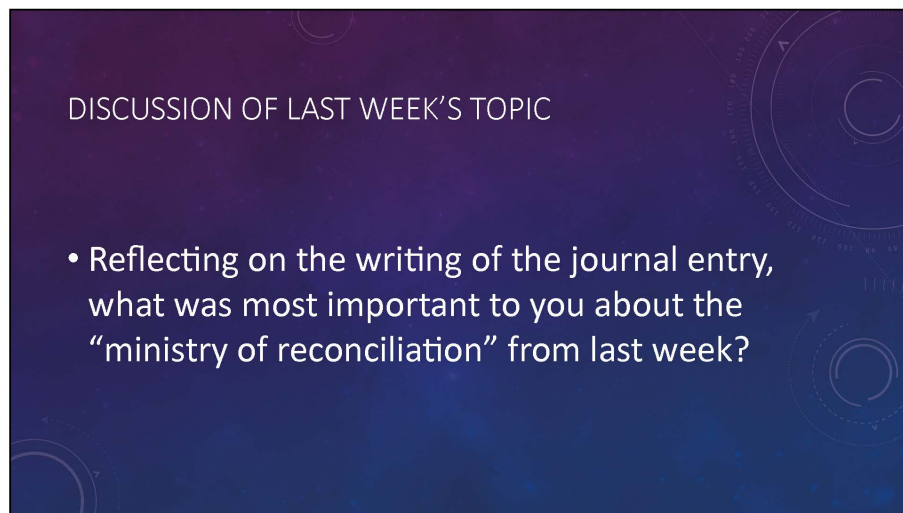
- Queer Church is a response to the horizontal sin put upon the LGBTQIA+ population by theologically conservative Christians who have historically sought to prescribe behavior rather than understand.
- The ministry of reconciliation vertical, but horizontal, seeking to heal wounds caused by Churches and Christians that prevent LGBTQIA+ Christians from feeling safe in a relationship with God.

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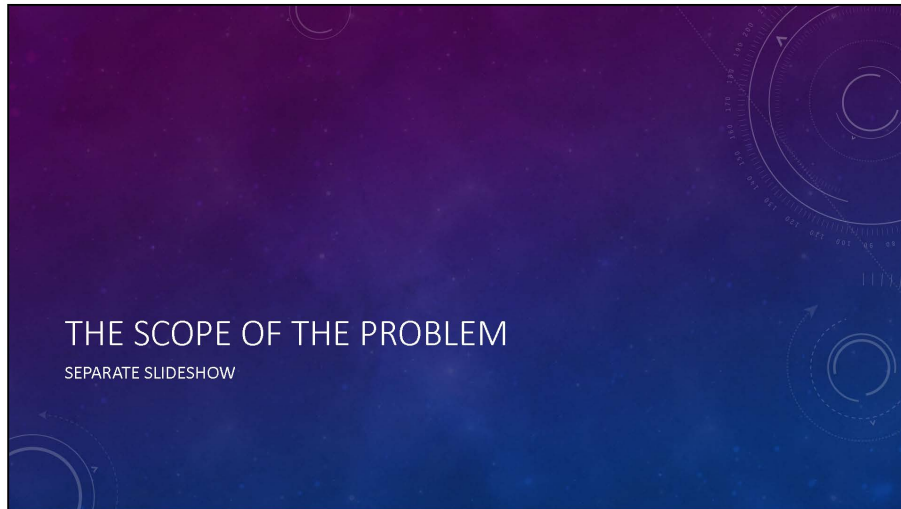


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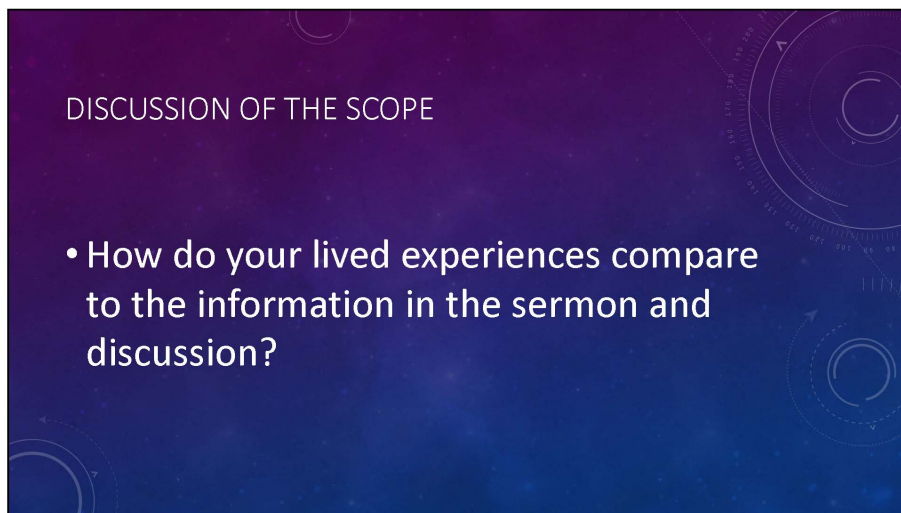


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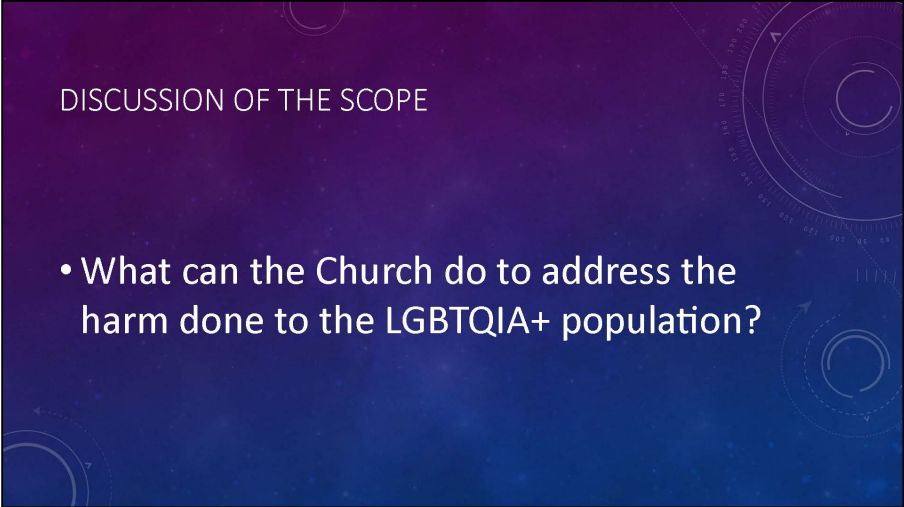


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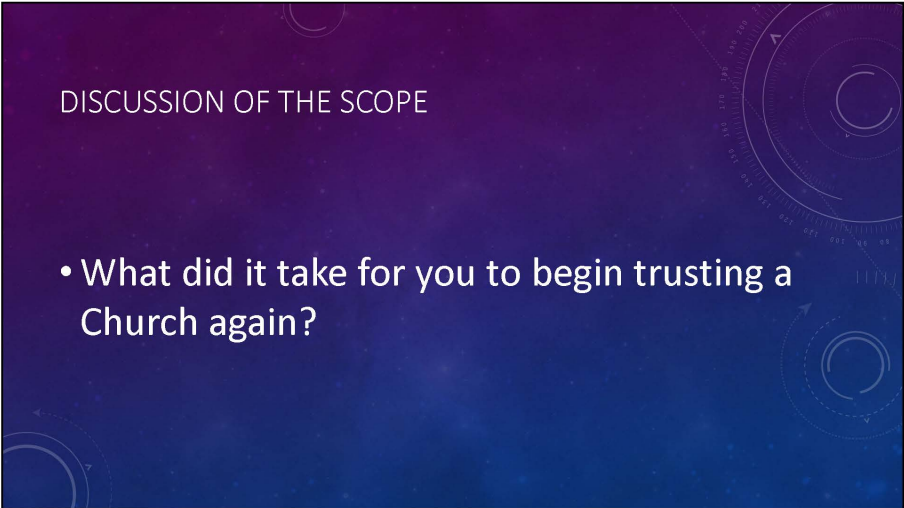
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DISCUSSION OF THE SCOPE

- What can the Church do to address the harm done to the LGBTQIA+ population?

5



DISCUSSION OF THE SCOPE

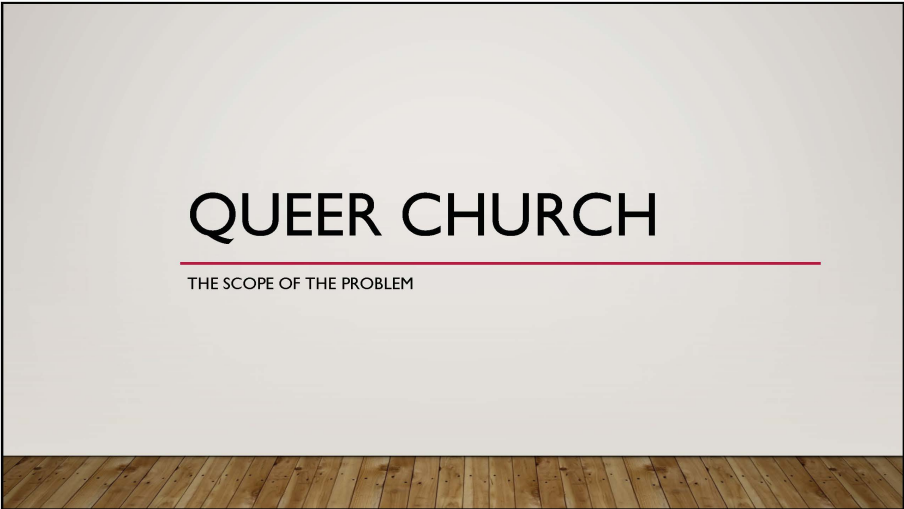
- What did it take for you to begin trusting a Church again?

6

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JOURNAL PROMPT

- What from your own experiences came up during the sermon and discussion about the problem of LGBTQIA+ discrimination in the church.



1

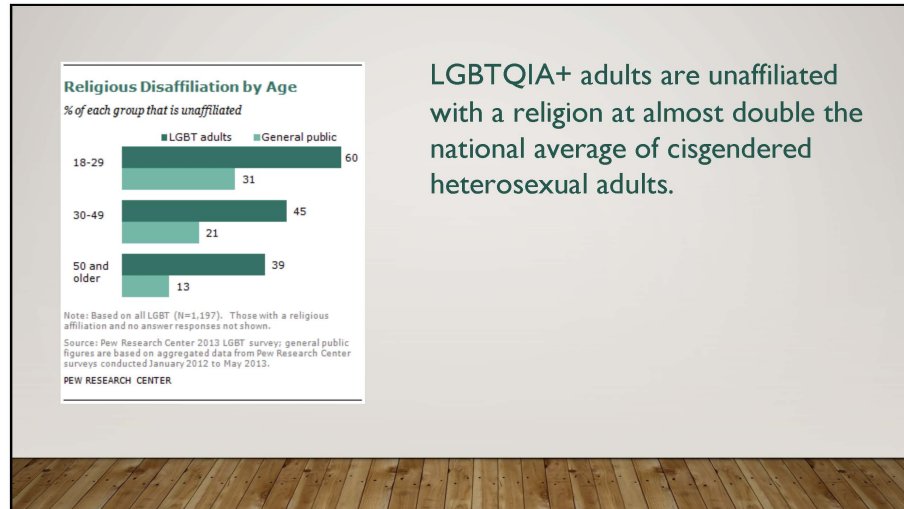


2

Nearly every member of the LGBTQIA+ community has the understanding that at least some religious institutions are unfriendly toward them.

Religious individuals are 3x more likely to have negative views of homosexuality than those who seldom or never attend.

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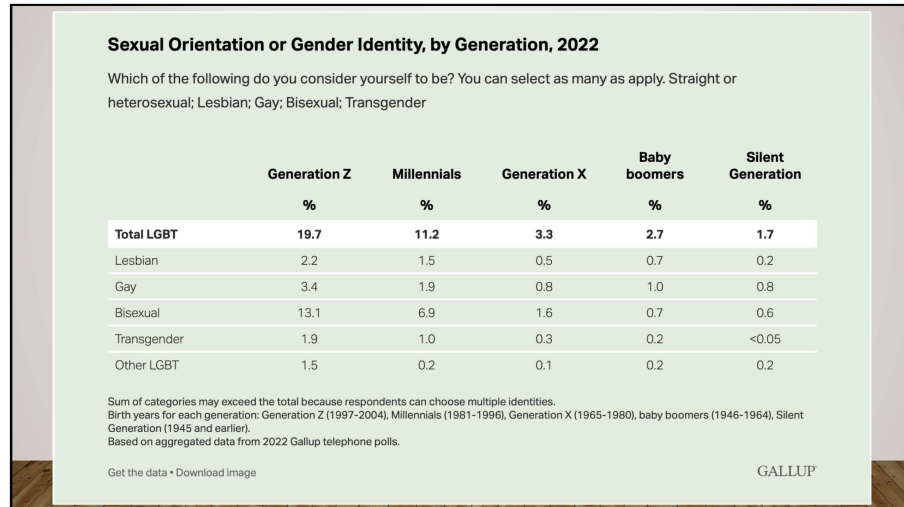


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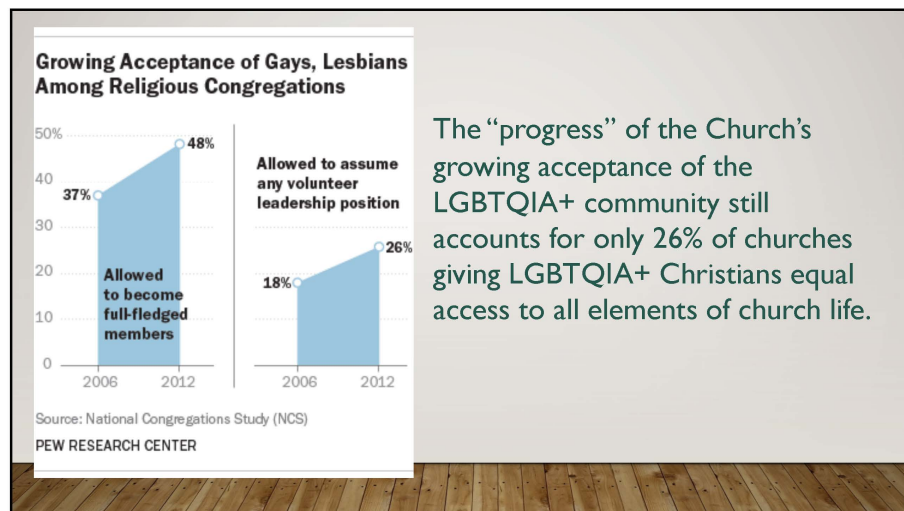


4

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5



6

SOME SOBERING STATISTICS

- 29.4% of LGBTQIA+ high school students have reported attempting suicide vs 6.4% of cisgendered heterosexual students.

7

SOME SOBERING STATISTICS

- 44% of Gen Z expresses feeling discriminated against because of race, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender identity at work.

8

SOME SOBERING STATISTICS

- 51% of Gen Z expresses feeling discriminated against because of race, ethnicity, sexuality, or gender identity at school.

9

SOME SOBERING STATISTICS

- 88% of Gen Z have expressed that they think employers should be asking preferred pronouns.

10

SOME SOBERING STATISTICS

- 25% of Gen Z have expressed that they would not accept a job if their preferred pronouns were not used.

11

SOME SOBERING STATISTICS

- Having at least one affirming adult in their life reduces the incidence of a suicide attempt by 40% for LGBTQIA+ youth.

12

SOME SOBERING STATISTICS

- 0 of the 100 biggest churches in the US are affirming.

QUEER CHURCH

SESSION 3

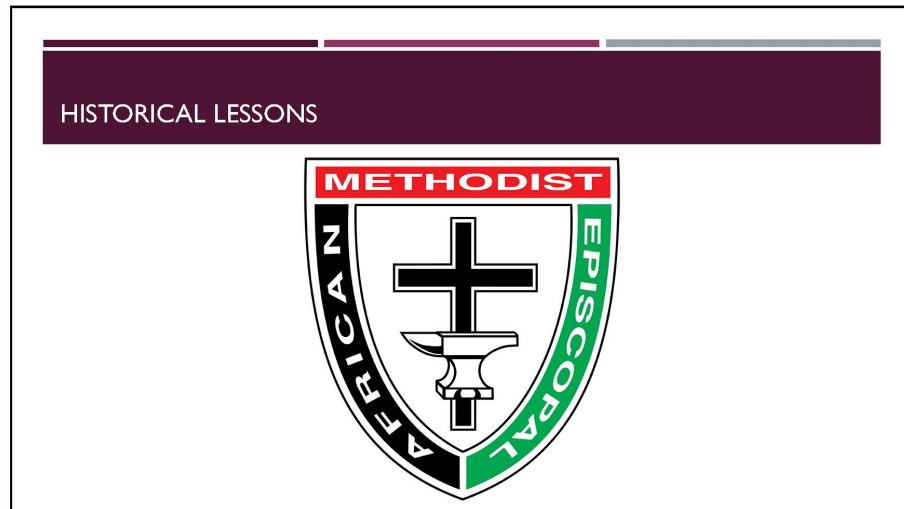
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DISCUSSION OF LAST WEEK'S TOPIC

- What stuck out to you most about why a LGBTQIA+ focused ministry is necessary, given the statistics shared?

2

12/15/23



3



4

DISCUSSION OF HISTORICAL LESSON

- How did the African American experience of discrimination and racism play into the formation of the AME Church?

5

DISCUSSION OF HISTORICAL LESSON

- How could that inform our experiences doing ministry with and as LGBTQIA+ Christians?

6

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DISCUSSION OF HISTORICAL LESSON

- What specifically can we learn from the AME Church?

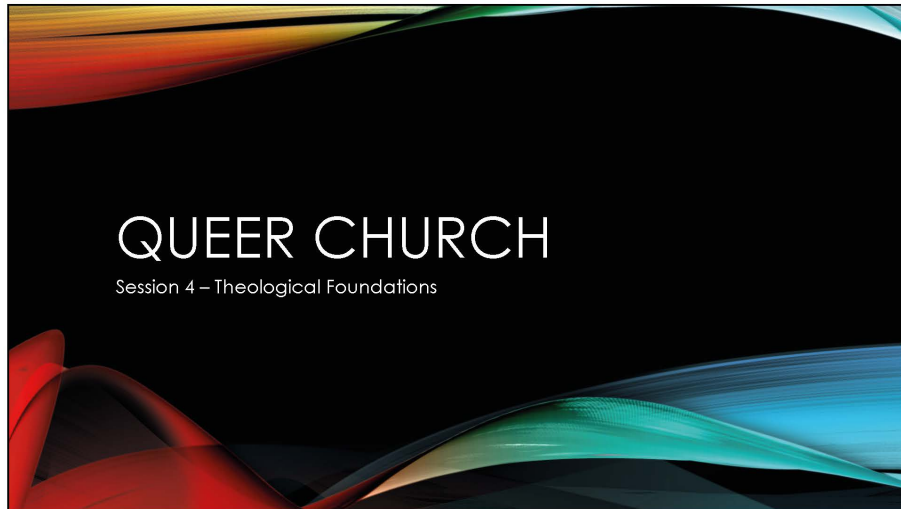
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JOURNAL PROMPT

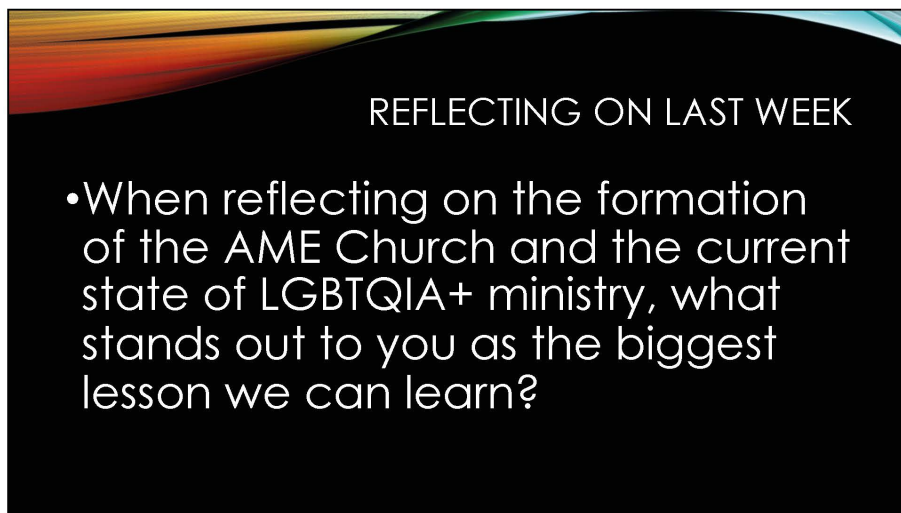
- What can we learn from the founding of the AME Church that translates into ministry to the LGBTQIA+ population?

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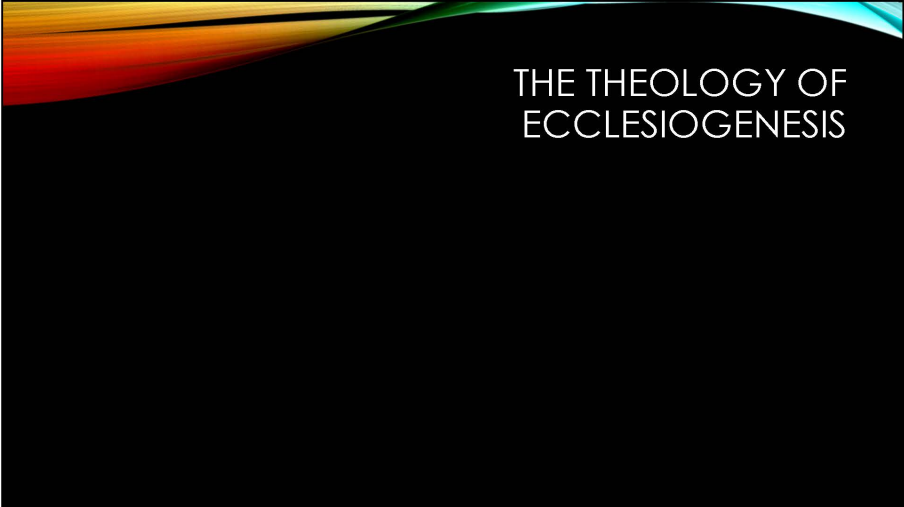


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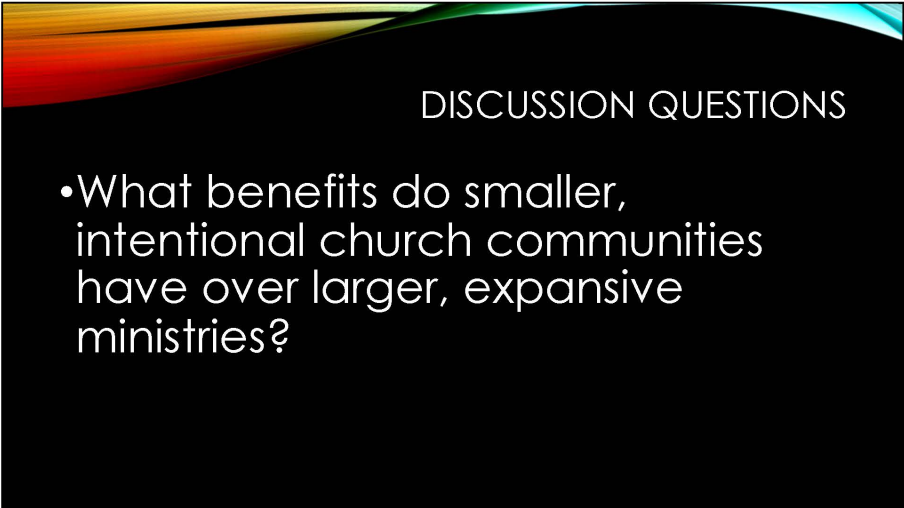
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THE THEOLOGY OF ECCLESIOGENESIS

3



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What benefits do smaller, intentional church communities have over larger, expansive ministries?

4

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How much a smaller and more intentional ministry better serve the LGBTQIA+ community?

5

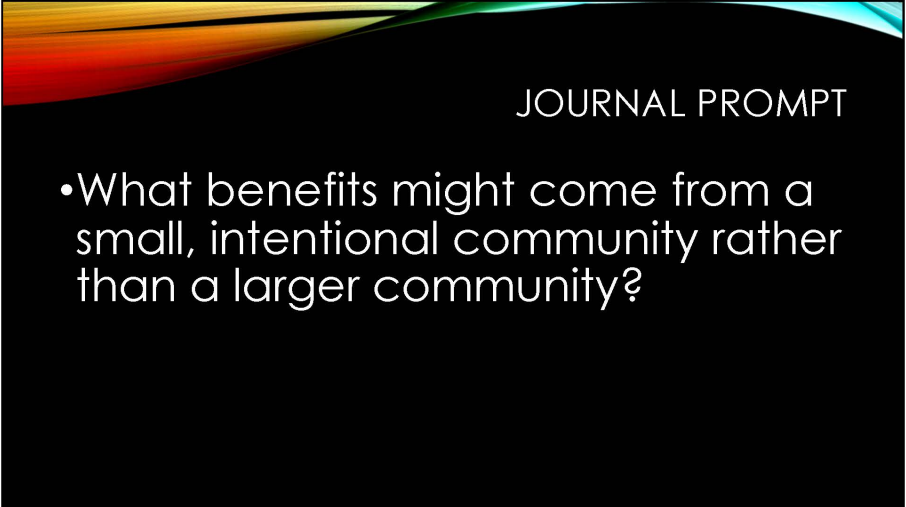
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What might such a community look like?

6

12/15/23



JOURNAL PROMPT

- What benefits might come from a small, intentional community rather than a larger community?



1

Defining Ecclesiogenesis

- “We are not dealing with the expansion of an existing ecclesiastical system, rotating on a sacramental, clerical axis, but with the emergence of another form of being church, rotating on the axis of the word and the laity.”

• Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis*, chap. 1.

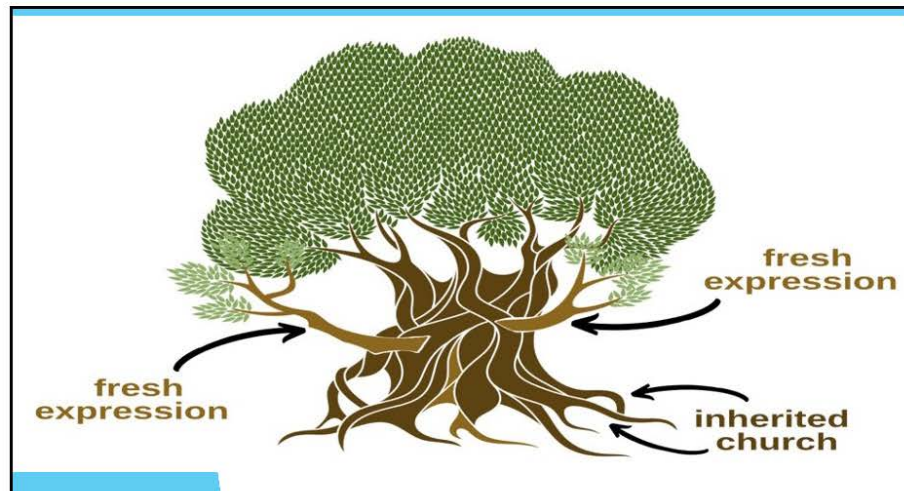
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Why Smaller, Intentional Communities?

- I argue that this is a paradigm for ecclesiology. The formation of churches always involves some sort of discernment of the Spirit's work in the world and an attempt to manifest that work in visible forms of life. With sufficient vision, the churches may come to see that the Spirit's people-forming work is larger and more inclusive than anything they can possibly represent with their own resources. Hence becoming the church does not mean making exclusive claims. It means prophetic decipherment on the one hand, and live signification on the other. I maintain that this is essentially an exegetical or interpretive process which leads to the building and constant re-forming of the visible church in the midst of the world.

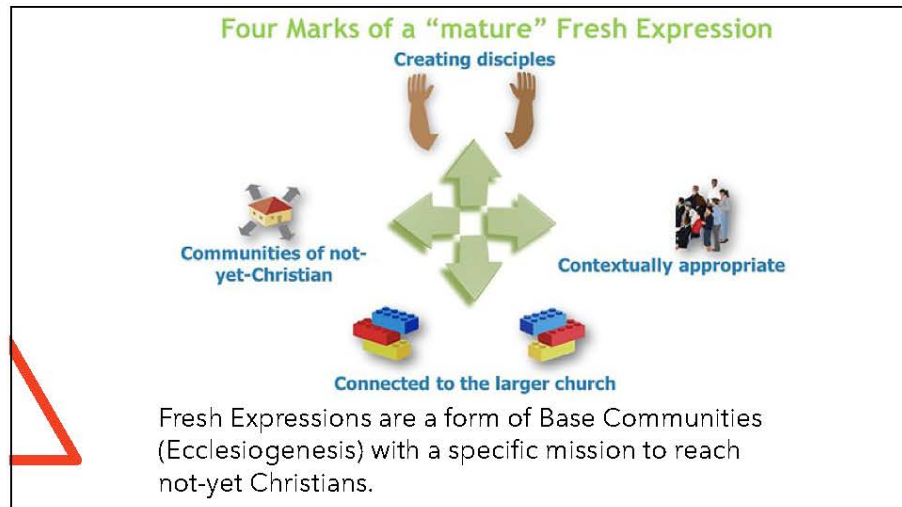
• Lewis S. Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics, Social Theory* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2001), 163.

3



4

12/15/23



5

How we know these are rightfully Church?

- 1. "Because it is founded on the common faith, and its objectives bear on a deepening and an increase of this faith, with all that this implies."
- 2. "Because there is a direct connection with the ecclesiastical framework, a sense of church of-the-people." Or, as another respondent put it: "Because it feels its oneness with the parish, diocese, and church universal."
- 3. "Because in religious activities only Catholics participate, while other activities are ecumenical" —that is, socioeconomic activities. Here we may add what another respondent said: "When you consider yourselves a church community, you can't work when your religious motives at different, or opposite."

6

How we know these are rightfully Church?

- 4. "Because the strictly religious activities are basic, while all the others are as a consequence of accepting God's word." Or again: "Christianity is the activating of integral humanism."
- 5. "Because we are working at the grassroots for a communion in faith, through humanization."

• Alfonso Gregory, "Dados Preliminares Sobre Experiências de CEB's no Brasil," in *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base: Utopia ou Realidade?* ed. Alfonso Gregory (Petrópolis, Brazil: Vozes, 1973), 53.

7

The Focus is on the Margins



Unfortunately, brothers and sisters, we are the product
Of a spiritualized, individualistic education.
We are taught:

Try to save your soul and don't worry
about the rest.

We told the suffering:

Be patient, heaven will follow, hand on.
No, that's not right, that's not salvation!
That's not the salvation Christ brought.
The salvation Christ brings
Is a salvation from every bondage
That oppresses human beings.

• Óscar A Romero and James R. Brockman, *The Violence of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 177.

8

Adaptation is the DNA of the Church

- The primitive church, in its essential apostolic character, created functions in response to needs or adapted a style already prevailing, as the synagogal concept was adapted in the college of presbyters. Whether or not to maintain past structures was unimportant. To render the risen One and his Spirit present to the world, to make his liberating message of grace, pardon, and unrestricted love heard, to facilitate human beings' response to these calls—these were the primary concerns.
- Boff, *Ecclesiology*, chap. 5.

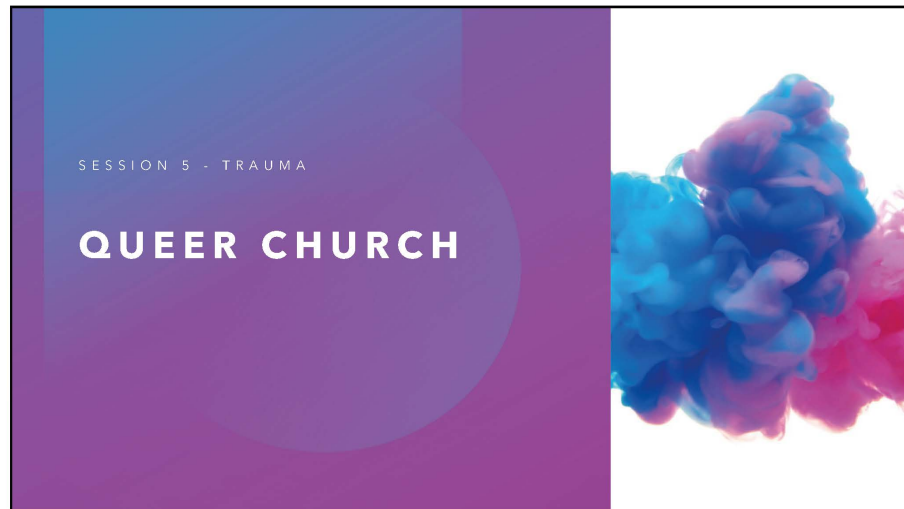
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A Base Community's Trajectory

- As the basic communities grow, they themselves provide more and more of the services that meet their needs. The people's awareness that they all are church, and therefore responsible, lends a new urgency to the question: Now that our coordinators perform all the pastoral tasks that an ordained minister performs, why can they not consecrate and absolve?
- Boff, *Ecclesiology*, chap. 6.

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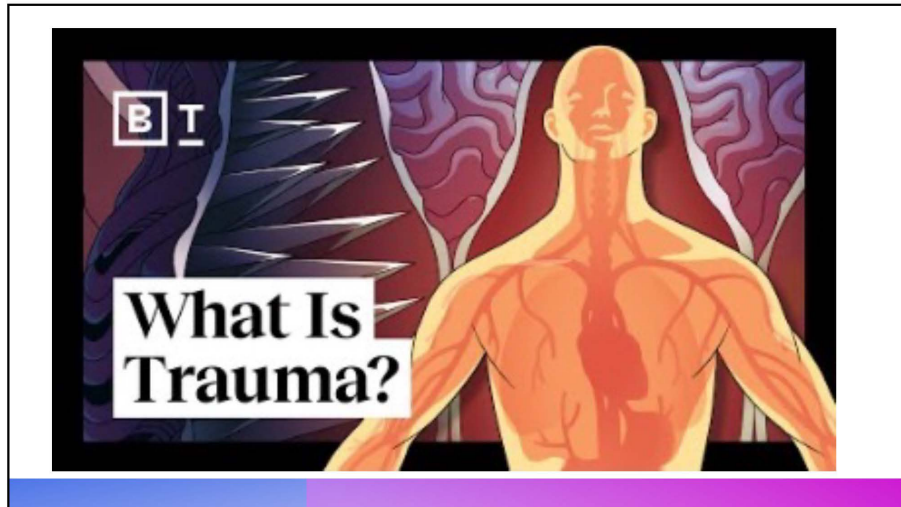
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3

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what ways have you experienced the Church causing or exacerbating the trauma of LGBTQIA+ individuals?

4

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How might it help for us to approach ministry with the LGBTQIA+ population from a trauma-informed perspective?

5

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What might that look like?

6

JOURNAL PROMPT

- How might an understanding of trauma psychology change the way we do ministry?

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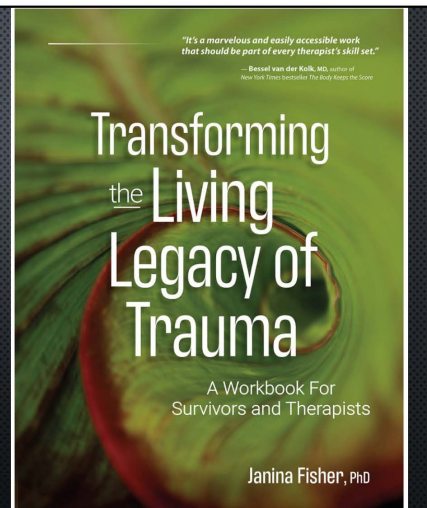
QUEER CHURCH

TRAUMA

1

I am not a mental health practitioner, nor do I hold any advanced degrees in psychology, psychiatry, counseling, or social work.

All of the information that follows is from this book, unless otherwise noted. Recommendations for further reading are available upon request.



2

1

12/15/23

WHAT IS TRAUMA?

- SAMHSA (SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION) DESCRIBES INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA AS AN EVENT OR CIRCUMSTANCE RESULTING IN:
 - PHYSICAL HARM
 - EMOTIONAL HARM
 - AND/OR LIFE-THREATENING HARM

3

THE EVENT OR CIRCUMSTANCE HAS LASTING ADVERSE EFFECTS ON THE INDIVIDUAL'S (SAMHSA):

- MENTAL HEALTH
- PHYSICAL HEALTH
- EMOTIONAL HEALTH
- SOCIAL WELL-BEING
- AND/OR SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

4

WHAT IS PTSD? (VIA THE APA)

- POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD) IS A PSYCHIATRIC DISORDER THAT MAY OCCUR IN PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED OR WITNESSED A TRAUMATIC EVENT, SERIES OF EVENTS OR SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES. AN INDIVIDUAL MAY EXPERIENCE THIS AS EMOTIONALLY OR PHYSICALLY HARMFUL OR LIFE-THREATENING AND MAY AFFECT MENTAL, PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, AND/OR SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING...

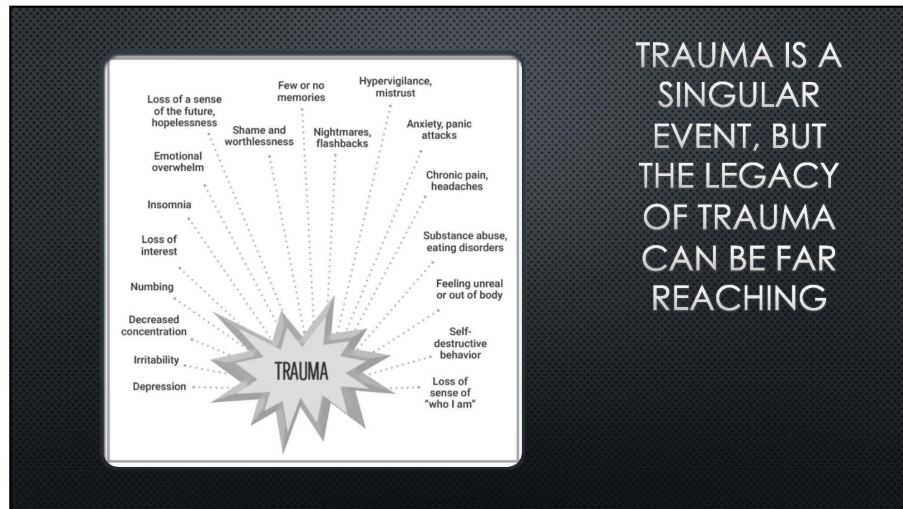
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WHAT IS PTSD? (VIA THE APA)

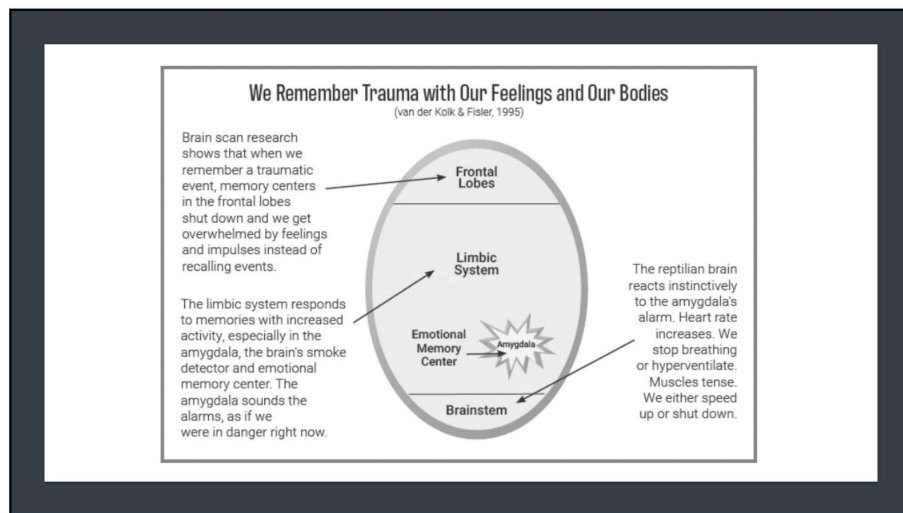
- PEOPLE WITH PTSD HAVE INTENSE, DISTURBING THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS RELATED TO THEIR EXPERIENCE THAT LAST LONG AFTER THE TRAUMATIC EVENT HAS ENDED. THEY MAY RELIVE THE EVENT THROUGH FLASHBACKS OR NIGHTMARES; THEY MAY FEEL SADNESS, FEAR OR ANGER; AND THEY MAY FEEL DETACHED OR ESTRANGED FROM OTHER PEOPLE. PEOPLE WITH PTSD MAY AVOID SITUATIONS OR PEOPLE THAT REMIND THEM OF THE TRAUMATIC EVENT, AND THEY MAY HAVE STRONG NEGATIVE REACTIONS TO SOMETHING AS ORDINARY AS A LOUD NOISE OR AN ACCIDENTAL TOUCH.

6

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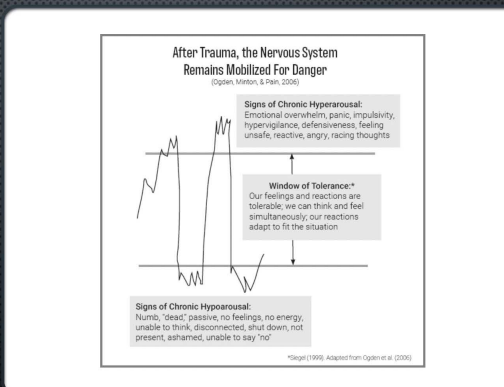
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We all have a window of tolerance. One of the symptoms of PTSD and other trauma disorders is a narrowing of the window.



9

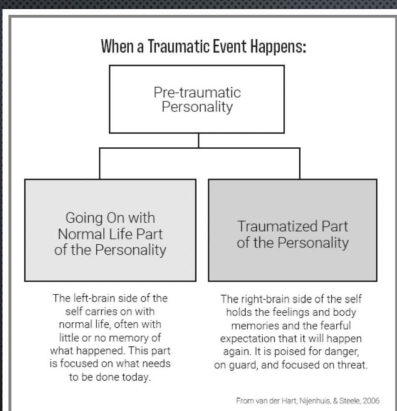


Figure 7.2: The Structural Dissociation Model

This image highlights why it's often possible for an individual who suffers from PTSD or other trauma disorders to function in a way often indistinguishable from someone without PTSD until a "trigger" happens.

10

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Our systems have many reactions to feeling unsafe, beyond the often-referenced "fight or flight." Different individuals, different traumas, and different situations can lead to very different responses when the traumatized part of the personality is activated.

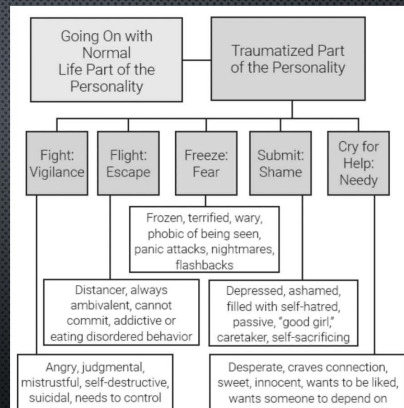


Figure 7.5: Figuring Out Who I Am

11

STAGES OF TRAUMA TREATMENT

Adapted from Judith Herman (1992)

STAGE 1: Safety and Stabilization: Overcoming Dysregulation

Tasks:

- Establishment of bodily safety
- Establishment of a safe environment
- Establishment of emotional stability

Goal: To create a safe and stable life in the here and now

STAGE 2: Coming to Terms with Traumatic Memories

Tasks:

- Overcoming the fear of the traumatic events and body/emotional memories so they can be integrated
- In order to metabolize the nonverbal memories, making use of EMDR, hypnotherapy, or body-oriented therapies

Goal: To come to terms with the traumatic past

STAGE 3: Integration and Moving On

Tasks:

- Decreasing shame and self-alienation
- Developing a greater capacity for healthy attachment
- Taking up personal and professional goals reflecting posttraumatic meaning-making

Goal: To overcome fears of a normal life, healthy challenge and change, and intimacy

A trauma-sensitive environment is necessary because we cannot expect individuals who are in Stage 1 of their healing journey to jump to Stage 2 or 3. Establishing safety is the first step, and for those who have been religiously traumatized, understanding the potential triggers is key.

12

Queer Church

Session 6 – Finishing Touches

1

Opening Question

○ Reflecting on last week's journal prompt, where do you think ministries can grow most in becoming trauma-sensitive?

2

Affirming Scriptures

3

Galatians 3:28 (NRSVUE)

- 28 There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

4

Discussion Question

- If there is no division between Christians in Christ Jesus, why do you think the church is so divided?

5

Discussion Question

- If the existing divisions are because of Christians poorly following the Bible, how can that free us in light of the way we've been treated by Christians?

6

Acts 10:9-15 (NRSVUE)

○9 About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while it was being prepared he fell into a trance. 11 He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.

7

Acts 10:9-15 (NRSVUE) cont.

○13 Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." 15 The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane."

8

Discussion Question

○-If Peter was correct in extending God's words here to be referring to the gentiles, how does that affect us?

9

Psalms 139: 13-14a

13 For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and
wonderfully made.

10

Discussion Question

- If it's true that God created every detail of us, including our sexuality and gender identity, how does that interact with the experiences you've had?

11

Isaiah 56:3-5 (NRSVUE)

3 Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say,
"The Lord will surely separate me from his people,"
and do not let the eunuch say,
"I am just a dry tree."
4 For thus says the Lord:
To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me

12

Isaiah 56:3-5 (NRSVUE) cont.

and hold fast my covenant,
5 I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

13

Acts 8:26-38 (NRSVUE)

26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) 27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." 30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

14

Acts 8:6-38 (NRSVUE) cont.

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.
33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

15

Acts 8:6-38 (NRSVUE) cont.

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" 38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

16

Discussion Question

- How did a better understanding of the nature of the Eunuch change how you view the Bible in relation to your identity?

17

Discussion Question

- What does Phillip's answer to the Eunuch's request for Baptism say to you about the Bible's view of sexuality and faith?

18

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